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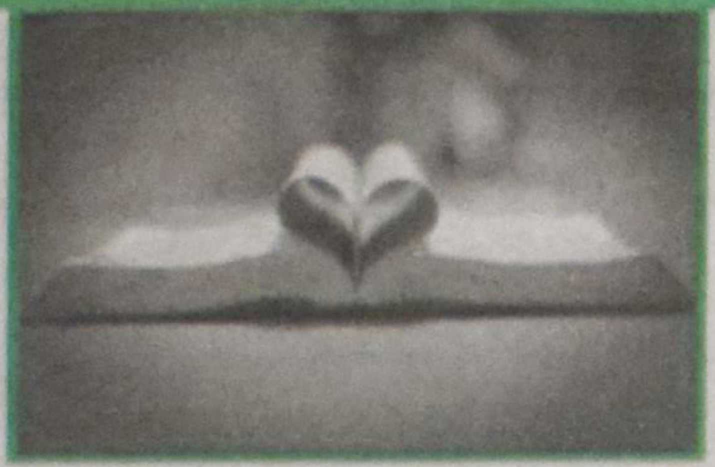

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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Rebuilding homes and hope in Haiti

One year after the quake

Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

LEOGANE, Haiti – "Last week I was at home, not doing anything," Marie Rose Joseph, a married mother of three, explains. "Then I was offered the chance to join this team to clean up the town."

Marie Rose is part of a group of 21 men and women working together to remove the remaining rubble from homes destroyed one year ago in Haiti's earthquake. There are 16 other teams just like theirs working on different sites in three communities as part of a Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) economic recovery project, which is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and supported by the United Nations Development Program.

Even though it's been a full year since the horrific earthquake took the lives of more than 230,000 people and left over a million homeless, visible reminders of this tragedy are everywhere. Marie Rose and her crew are helping to change that.

"Getting people's lives back to some semblance of normalcy requires that the rubble and debris – constant reminders of the trauma of 12 January – be removed from the streets, from homes and businesses," says Jean Designe Henry, CRWRC's engineer supervising the project. "People need to re-open businesses and re-start economic activities in their communities. This project is providing the opportunity for people to do this."

A year of aid in Leogane:
- 3,500 tarps
- 800 homes
- 22 community latrines
- 19 wells
- 1,400 toolkits for removing rubble
- emergency funds for 2,331 households
- two months of food for 4,603 families

6 year-old Tou of Croix de Pere enjoys a drink from CRWRC artesian well.

Clearing debris is not all that aid organizations have been doing. CRWRC received over $11.5 million in donations for its Haiti earthquake response, and their Disaster Response Team decided to use these funds in a concentrated area of Haiti. After some careful assessment, the organization focused

See **Haiti** *on page 2*

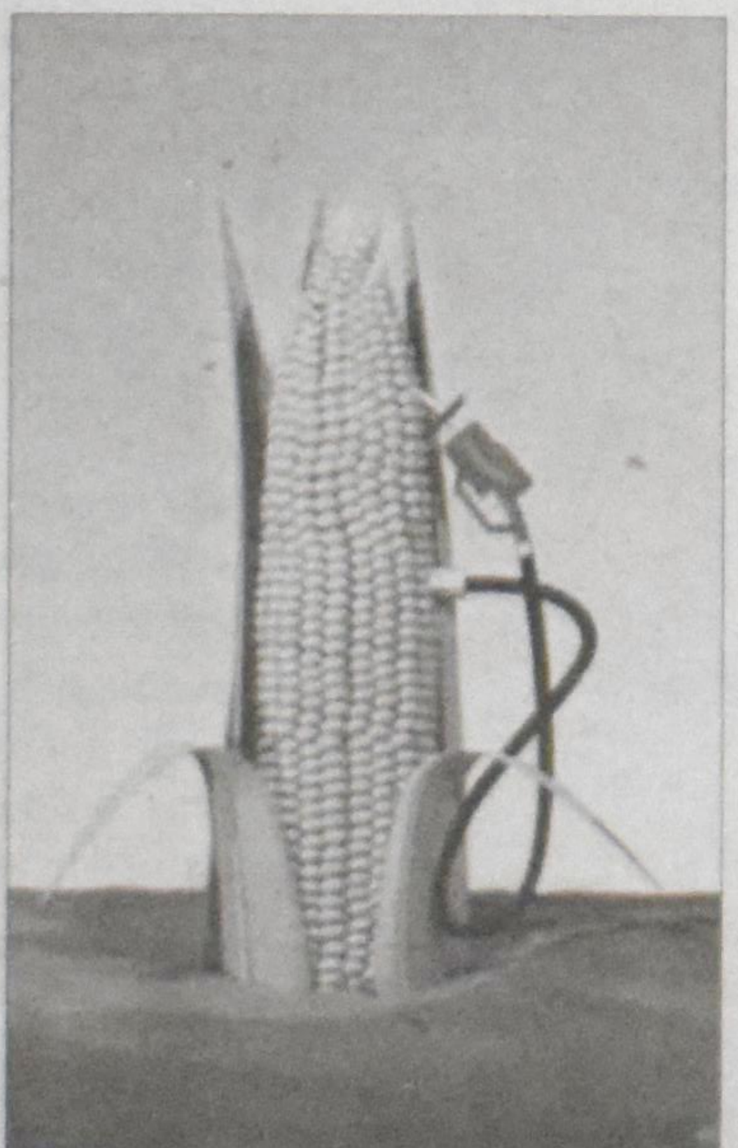
Next generation of biofuels avoids food controversy

Part II of a series on global energy issues

Mike Wevers

EDMONTON, Alberta – As the December solstice officially welcomed winter into the northern hemisphere, many countries around the world were already experiencing winter's icy grip. Demand for heating fuels increased, oil stocks in the United States decreased and oil prices rose to over $90 per barrel. Could the one in about 400 year coincidence of winter solstice and lunar eclipse be an omen of even more oil price increases to come?

The usual critics pointed to the unseasonably cold temperatures, even for winter, as further evidence of the fallacy of climate change. This ignores climate scientists who have stated that as the earth's temperature gradually increases, we will experience greater variability in local



climates, which was evident in many European countries in December. The current demand increase and price spike reinforce the need to find alternative fuel sources, not only to reduce oil dependency but to also reduce the greenhouse gases exhausted by burning oil.

Ethical ethanol?

Biofuels are believed to be one of the sources that will alleviate the demand for oil, its price and greenhouse gas pressures. The predominant biofuel available in North America is ethanol, whose primary source is corn. Biodiesel, more common in Europe, is typically derived from vegetable oils such as canola.

There is no doubt that ethanol-blended fuel reduces harmful greenhouse gas emissions from the tailpipe. In a world concerned with climate change, this, at first glance, seems crucial. However, greenhouse gas emissions may not be significantly reduced from a total production perspective. The carbon footprint of ethanol, because of the additional greenhouse gases emitted in its production, is significantly larger than what just comes out of your car's exhaust. We have to include the exhaust of the tractors used in corn production. And even though this decreases city smog by limiting the exhaust to less-populated rural areas, the net effect cannot be summarized as beneficial.

"The United States desperately needs a liquid fuel replacement for oil in the near future," Dr. Pimentel, Ecology Professor at Cornell, states, "but producing ethanol or biodiesel from plant biomass is going down the wrong road." In 2005, Cornell University and the University of California – Berkeley released a joint study which seriously criticized the perceived benefit of burning ethanol. As Dr. Pimentel explains, "you use more energy to produce these fuels than you get out from the combustion of these products." In its analysis, the study looked at a total energy input equation, not just the fuel used by farm tractors, but the energy used in producing fertilizers as well to enhance crop growth.

Food, not fuel

The arguments on the total emissions effect is important, but Christians have another angle. If we are conscious of being good stewards of the earth and sharing resources with those in need, using food products to fill our gasoline tanks raises some red flags. Jean Ziegler, Vice President of the United

See **Global energy** *on page 2*

News

Haiti *continued*

its attention on five communities near Leogane, about 29 kilometers west of the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.

"90 percent of the people [of Leogane] lost their homes in the quake," says CRWRC's Disaster Response Director, Wayne deJong, of the town of about 134,000 people. "It was the epicenter of the earthquake, so the need was great. In addition, there is a Haitian Christian Reformed Church there. The people already knew us, so we were able to tap in to some local leaders to help us carry out our relief response."

Expanding on these existing relationships, CRWRC organized Community Advisory Committees to help them understand the local context, identify the greatest needs, and also have the best access for aid distribution.

"When there is a new organization in town, people don't know who they are, what they represent, or what they do. They need someone to be a mediator, to facilitate communication between the two groups," explains Marie Marthe Consolé, a 39-year-old mother of three and a member of the Community Advisory Committee in Flon.

Quake-proof

CRWRC also began rebuilding homes – wood-framed buildings built to earthquake resistant standards. Wherever possible, these homes are being constructed on the cement pads where family's previous home stood, in order to provide people with a sense of continuity and security. The aid organization is careful to clear up title issues, so that recipients of each wood-framed home can receive a certificate of ownership upon completion. Since many records were lost in the earthquake, this step takes time but will help to ensure that no one will take a home away from a family in the future. By the end of 2010, CRWRC had built over 800 of these homes, with additional houses being constructed each week in order to get as many people into new homes as quickly as possible.

Locals like Marie Rose Joseph have been hired to clean up rubble.

While food distributions, tarps, and homes have helped to meet people's physical needs, many earthquake survivors also have severe emotional trauma after living through the disaster and losing loved ones.

"It is a mistake to see the reconstruction of Haiti as a purely physical issue," emphasizes Cleeford Dalcé, CRWRC's Community Liaison responsible for managing CRWRC's psycho-social support activities in Haiti. "It's also about psychological, emotional, and spiritual reconstruction as well."

CRWRC's response reflects this philosophy. The organization combines physical, spiritual, psychological, and social reconstruction with its short-term and long-term development activities. For example, CRWRC started training community leaders on ways to support their communities in dealing with the emotional aftershocks. Nine men and nine women were trained to lead psycho-social activities in their communities. To date, over fifteen hundred people have participated in a variety of activities and sessions carried out in the five target communities.

And now community members, such as Marie Rose Joseph, have been employed to clear the remaining rubble and provide a blank slate for 2011. Not only will the cleared land illustrate the fresh start that the new year offers, but the 733 short-term employees who have been hired to do the work now have a new source of income that they can use to re-start their businesses and invest back into the local economy.

The country of Haiti still has a long way to go to recover from last year's earthquake. Recent violence surrounding contested elections and an outbreak of cholera have set back many of the advances made over the past 12 months. Yet in five communities in Leogane, people have hope. Their physical needs are being met, their neighborhood is being rebuilt, they are receiving support for their emotional needs, and now they have an investment of cash to help boost their local economy. It looks like 2011 is shaping up to be much better than its predecessor.

Marie Consolé mediates between Haitians and CRWRC.

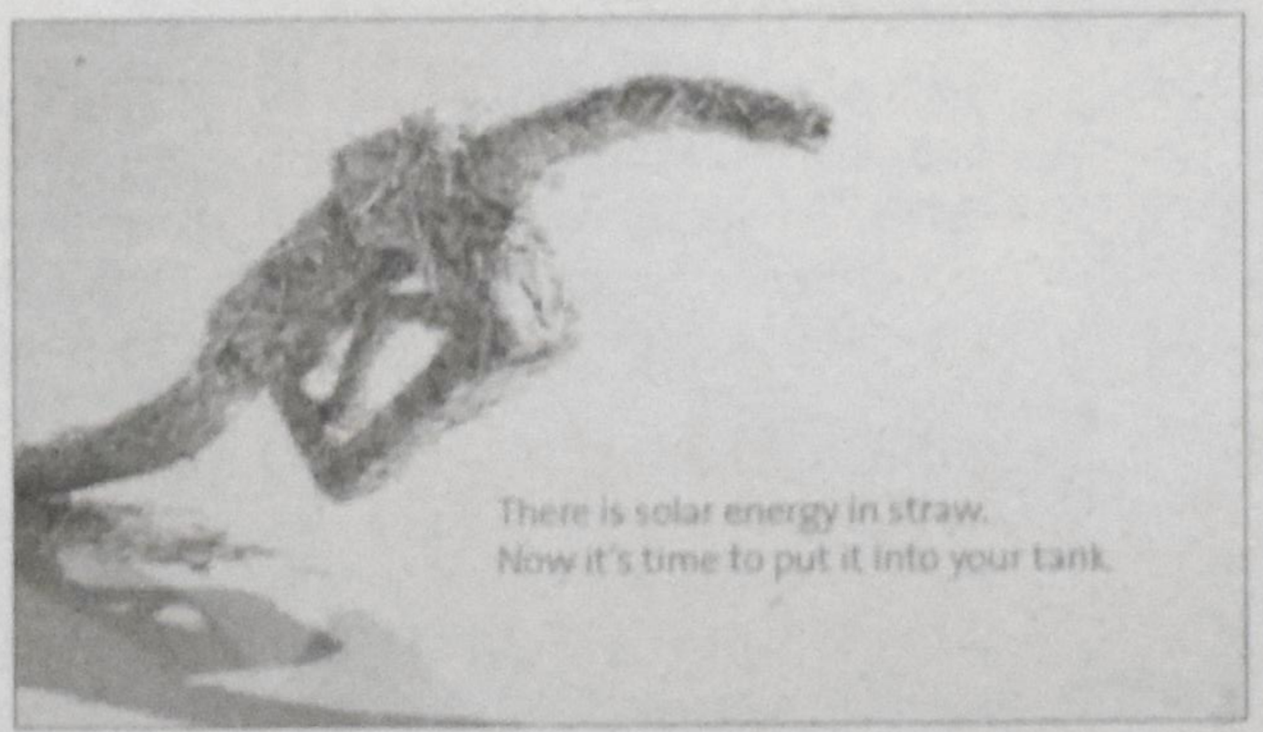
Cholera Prevention Session in Flon.

Kristen deRoo VanderBerg is Communications Manager for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. She lives in Brampton, Ontario.

Global energy *continued*

Nations Human Rights Council and UN Special Rappateur on the Right to Food until 2008, agrees. Ziegler has said that he "is gravely concerned that biofuels will bring hunger in their wake. The sudden, ill-conceived, rush to convert food – such as maize, wheat, sugar and palm oil – into fuels is a recipe for disaster. There are serious risks of creating a battle between food and fuel that will leave the poor and hungry in developing countries at the mercy of rapidly rising prices for food, land and water." His 2007 report goes on to point to another compelling reason to examine the relationship between biofuels and climate change. If demand increases, developing countries will continue to slash forests, the world's lungs, to create more cropland to produce biofuel.

So why does ethanol continue to get so much support as an alternative fuel, and why are governments considering raising the 10 percent blend limit? Well, there is a considerably large agricultural base that sees ethanol production as a welcome alternative end product to help stabilize, if not increase, prices for corn production. Such production remains heavily subsidized by governments, increasing profits for the large food production companies who supply the ethanol. With such widespread beneficiaries in ethanol production – suppliers farmers and food conglomerates – the advantages, sometimes won after hard battles, will not be easily surrendered.



Volkswagen is working with Iogen to produce SunFuel, a biofuel made from straw.

Using organic residues

Given how embattled ethanol produced from primary food products is becoming, the search is on for alternative sources. "Second generation" biofuels are now being developed, using biomass material that does not interfere in food supply. Instead, this type of fuel uses residual debris like straw, bark and pulp. Through different chemical processes the sugars can be obtained from the residue to make ethanol. The technology is in early stages. Good news in Canada is that an Ottawa demonstration plant is leading the way. Iogen, which opened six years ago, has seen production successfully increase each year. It's considering opening a full-scale production plant.

Consequently, there is still hope that second-generation biofuels are part of the solution to finding alternative energy to power our vehicles and achieving real reductions in harmful greenhouse gas emissions. If full-scale production is achieved in this new promising technology, we may be able to achieve more than the current two percent offset that biofuels have achieved in world transport fuel demand. At such low world-wide production levels for biofuels, we need to continue to look for alternative sources of energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Do wind and solar power, which do not have the carbon footprint of first generation biofuels, hold better hope for a world desperate for environmentally friendly solutions? I don't think the world has 400 years, until the next coincident winter solstice and lunar eclipse, to find out.

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton. *The next article of this series will examine solar and wind energy to see how effectively these alternative energy sources reconcile climate change challenges with world energy demands.*

News

Trends you may have missed:

Overlooked news stories from 2010

Dan Murphy (CSM)

BOSTON, Mass. – The past year has been tumultuous: the Afghanistan war ground on, the Iraq war started to wind down and huge government debts led to austerity and anxiety across Europe. But there were also global trends you may have missed, and fascinating stories that didn't hit the headlines.

1. Suicide attacks are falling

Terror-style attacks remain a danger, particularly in places like Pakistan and Iran. But the U.S. Department of Homeland Security reported 121 suicide attacks globally that took 1,270 lives through June. That was on pace to be well below the 2009 total, in which 299 attacks claimed 3,177 lives. That, in turn, was fewer than in 2008.

Suicide attacks in Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan claimed 88 percent of casualties in 2009 and led the list in the first six months of 2010. But they were responsible for 71 percent of a smaller total in 2010.

Other countries have seen even more dramatic declines. The end of Sri Lanka's war with the Tamil Tigers saw suicide attacks drop from killing 46 in 2009 to none this year. In Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, which once confronted frequent Islamist suicide attacks, there were none.

High levels of violence and terrorism persist, but widespread fears that such tactics would proliferate after 9/11 haven't been borne out.

Robert Pape, a political science professor at the University of Chicago and coauthor of *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop it*, says suicide attacks fell in 2010 largely because of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Only about 10 percent of people involved in what's usually termed terrorism set their eyes abroad, he argues, and most suicide attackers target local military occupations.

He believes that suicide attacks in Gaza and parts of the West Bank are also down "like 99 percent" because of the Israeli pullout. But he predicts that, as the war in Afghanistan ramps up and the drone war continues in Pakistan, suicide attacks in those areas are likely to rise. "All we're going to do is trade suicide attacks in Iraq for attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan," he notes.

2. A decline in global hunger

The global recession continues. Ireland and Greece had to be bailed out by their wealthier neighbours. Portugal or even Spain may follow suit. In poorer nations like Egypt, the rising cost of food has far outstripped wage growth or job creation. Drought in Russia, a major wheat producer, led to its banning grain exports, creating fear about global food supplies.

But it appears that the ranks of the chronically malnourished fell in 2010. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) said in September that 2010 probably saw the first decline of malnourished people in 15 years.

Why? A number of poorer nations saw strong economic growth. The International Monetary Fund estimates that the global economy grew 4.6 percent, after declining by 0.6 percent in 2009. And despite Russia's agricultural prices, other parts of the globe had bumper crops. U.S. grain production hit a record in 2010.

To be sure, vast numbers of people are still hungry. The 10 percent decline in the "chronically malnourished" in 2010 leaves 925 million undernourished – still – and the number is higher than before the economic shock of 2008. The FAO warns that this year's gains are fragile.

3. Change in one-child China?

Many had expected this year to mark the end of China's 30-year-old "one child per family" policy. In September, however, the head of the National Population and Family Planning Council announced that China will stick with the policy for "decades."

Something is afoot. China has ended the requirement that parents must get a permit to have their first child, and for years it has generally tolerated two children or more in rural areas. Since the rules eased, analysts estimate that only about 35 percent of China's 1.3 billion people live in areas where it's enforced.

China's estimated fertility rate per woman is 1.6 children, well below the 2.1 needed to keep a population stable, and there may be other factors reining in China's population. Some predict that up to 30 million Chinese men won't have brides available to them by 2020 because the policy spurred selective abortion of girls. Others worry about the economic effect the policy will have, given an aging population.

The Egyptian government subsidizes the cost of bread.

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Editorials

Santa or the spirit?

A post-Christmas rant

Brett Alan Dewing

By now, many of us are sick of Christmas. By mid-December, hearing another carol or seeing a Christmas special on TV may even elicit a "humbug." But no one can call me a Scrooge. I love Christmas with a steely resolve. In the last weeks of December, I decorated the 7th tree in our house and made plans for an 8th. I have so many products from *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* that my bedroom is about to burst with singing, dancing plush snowmen, elves, prospectors, and, well, reindeer. I have a whole section in my DVD collection for Christmas specials (including *He-Man and She-Ra: A Christmas Special*). But something about Christmas specials really bothers me. Too many suffer from a lack of focus. The truth is that when you take the birth of the Savior out of the holiday that bears his epithet, you're left scrounging for the obligatory moral of your Christmas parable. And so we get dozens (likely hundreds) of specials urging children to believe in Santa Claus and adults to recapture the ethereal "Spirit of the Season."

A Messiah-yearning

Let's take the first type, the children's Christmas movie that shows a disillusioned kid rediscovering Santa. It's a safe bet that the writers, producers, and directors of these films do not believe in a jolly fat man magically delivering toys on Christmas Eve. In fact, if stereotypes prove true, they're cynical humanists who believe in nothing save the human will. And yet they are compelled to create fables in which children are almost duped into some kind of vague ignorance that passes for innocence.

Dear show-businessmen, it is not innocence. (And all this talk of recapturing childhood innocence is an illusion itself. No matter what Sarah McLaughlin may insist, we are not born innocent, Adia.) No, what you are propagandizing your (and our) youth with is the kind of backwards wishful thinking you so often accuse us Christians of. I, by the way, have no beef against Santa. Tell your kids whatever productive myths you feel appropriate to foster their sense that this world is more than they perceive. But there comes a time when those myths become just that: myths to order and interpret their world and no longer anything bearing the mantle of objective veracity. It is a healthy and normal progression of the human mind. And so why would we want to tell our maturing children that there really is a Santa? Well, the answer is simple, I suppose. We all have a Messiah-yearning built into us. We want to believe that some supernatural grandfather is there to do the big spending. That's what Christmas is all about, after all, but while a belief in Santa is socially acceptable, a faith in the Manger-Child is not.

Goodwill seems good enough

Which brings me to the second type of Christmas special, the one made for adults which exults the almost pagan Spirit of Christmas. These specials, unlike the first variety, are not limited to adult fare, of course. This kind of show often involves strange angel stand-ins and harried modern/post-modern career people who are guided by the former mysterious strangers into embracing a "child-like" feeling of Goodwill.

Yep, goodwill. The Divine Godhead sent one of his persons to become sin and die for us, and we reduce it to a sense of willing good. Just willing it, having a warm fuzzy for mankind. That's it. Not even doing good, in many cases, but simply willing it. The same "religious impulse" is evident in this type of fare. The closest we can get to admitting moral Truth is to wish for that biblical idea, "peace on earth, goodwill to men." It's not exactly concrete. Try putting that on your company's goal assessment. But the very suits that would cut you down if you claimed goodwill as your bottom line will push it on you in Christmas media, attached, of course, to a "destined" romantic coupling. They sense that there is a romance being played out, but they have the players all wrong. God is wooing them, and they settle for Doris Roberts winking and fading out view.

But for all their flaws, I love Christmas specials, provided they don't cross the twin lines of sentimentality and sacrilege and, let's be honest, as long as they're of some artistic quality. Even when we don't see the Divine Mystery of Christmas deepened in our hearts, we can take part in the downright silliness that is an integral part of the joy of God becoming man for us.

Brett Alan Dewing is outgoing Features Editor for CC.

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Mending holes in society's fabric

Andrea Mrozek

In the 13 days leading up to December 1, five young men were killed in Toronto. Nicholas Yombo, a resident of Toronto's Regent Park, was one who lost his life. And while his death is part of a sad stream of violence, it stood out for two reasons. One was that when his father commented on his death, it was to say that he was a bad kid. The other is the simple fact that Nicholas had a father available for comment.

Family breakdown, largely fatherlessness, is part of social disintegration in our communities. This is as true in Canada as it is in the United States. Acknowledging family breakdown as a part of social breakdown is important to solve problems like the spate of shootings in Toronto.

In late November, I had the opportunity to visit with a group south of the border that has had great success in changing crime-ridden communities. The Center for Neighbourhood Enterprise uses local partners and a heavy dose of mentoring and personal relationship building for success. In short, they believe in re-weaving the social fabric – an attempt to replace broken family relationships instead of just throwing federal dollars at a problem.

Our visit focused on George Wythe High School in Richmond, Virginia, about two hours away from Washington DC. Just two years earlier, the school was on the verge of losing its accreditation because academic outcomes were so poor. They could no longer host home football games because they always broke out into violence. Car thefts were rampant, there was an increased police presence and high rates of truancy and suspensions.

The mentor difference

Enter the Center for Neighbourhood Enterprise and their Violence Free Zone initiative. Mentors are brought into the school – people who are not a branch of the police or security. They get to know the students, their situations and their families. They walk kids to class, if need be. They can come and intervene should a situation with staff appear to be escalating.

The new principal at George Wythe High School, Willie Bell, is a supporter of the program. He told us that most kids want to do well but some act as leaders in negative behaviour. By identifying those "leaders," and having the mentors track expressly with them, other children are freed to learn and play sports. Bell also put in place rigourous standards for teachers, who must have a learning plan on each and every student by early October.

The Center for Neighbourhood Enterprise demands that solutions be local. So even though the Violence Free Zone initiative has been done in various schools around the country, the mentors live in the community. In this case, the mentors come from a nearby church called the Richmond Outreach Center (ROC). The ROC is entirely dedicated to outreach (they recently bought out a former WalMart to set up shop). The church is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and offers a gym, a dance studio, computer classes, language training, a daycare and hands out over 3000 bags of groceries a week. The sanctuary space doubles as basketball courts. The people who go there have made Richmond's inner city their prime concern.

Academics at Baylor University examined George Wythe High School and quantified the success, saying the impact has been "immediate and dramatic." There has been a 35 percent decrease in student absences, a 10 percent decrease in suspension days and a 41 percent decrease in truancy rates. They found 18 percent fewer calls to police, 15 percent reduction in arrests at the school and a 61 percent reduction in car thefts within 1000 feet of the school.

Bad situations, not 'bad kids'

Bell says this about his students: "If you experienced what some of them were going through at home, you wouldn't be able to survive." Simultaneously, he explains that he won't accept any disrespect from any student. Given these two attitudes, one begins to see how he combines compassion with rules and respect.

Back to Toronto, where Nicholas Yombo's dad said his son was a bad kid. Perhaps that's true. But a group of volunteering citizens, a principal who cares and a civic-minded charity have worked successfully to change "bad kids" into good ones who contribute to society. It's fair to say that change will not lie exclusively with money, but rather by re-weaving the social fabric. While overcoming some of the social problems that result from family breakdown is difficult, the Center for Neighbourhood Enterprise, working with local Christians, reminds us it is not an impossible task.

Andrea Mrozek is the Manager of Research and Communications at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada (www.imfcanada.org).

Letters

Living the gospel of peace

Thanks, Bert Witvoet, for the punch line in your article about the Ground-Zero mosque (Nov. 22). Your closing line says it all: "We engage these authorities with great hope, not by taking away their right to exist and establish themselves, but by speaking and living the gospel of peace." A Christ-like life evokes changes in the mindset of others because good triumphs over bad and right triumphs over wrong. It has the backing of the Holy Spirit. Ground Zero is a good place for Christians to gather in the open air and express their joy with the indwelling Christ. Any belief system less than that will lose its adherents. Opposing false (and therefore inferior) belief systems or attacking them can only be at the expense of bypassing the intrinsic value of one's own faith.

But Witvoet's closing line deserves further exposition. It's a battle cry asking for a battle strategy. Walking the walk and talking the talk has God's guarantee to pick up a following. Twelve apostles did just that in the midst of all kinds of heresies. Seeing that light, hundreds in darkness gladly came forward to henceforth live in that light and even die for it in the arenas. Does the Word not say, "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?" (Col. 2:20). If Mohammed is king, quit fearing and walk over. If Christ is King, rise and shine, giving God the glory.

Pete Ravensbergen
Vernon, B.C.

Further failings of 'the pill'

I enjoyed Angela Reitsma Bick's editorial entitled, "Out of control: the unchallenged authority of 'the pill'" (Dec. 13). There is one very important aspect, however, which she did not touch on – the abortive effects caused by the birth control pill.

The pill works in three ways. The first and main way it works is by preventing ovulation. It also works by thickening the mucus plug at the opening of the cervix. This can act as a barrier method to prevent sperm from entering. The third and final way it acts is by hardening the lining of the womb, so that if fertilization does occur implantation is sometimes prevented, causing a "micro-abortion" to occur at one week of life (Dr. and Mrs. Wilke, *Why Can't We Love Them Both?*). Many of us do not know about this third function of the pill. Many Christians who are opposed to abortion are unknowingly subjecting themselves to the very thing they are against. For this reason it is very important to be fully informed when making choices about which contraceptive we use.

Emily Hoogerbrugge
Port Lambton, Ontario

An exchange of apologies

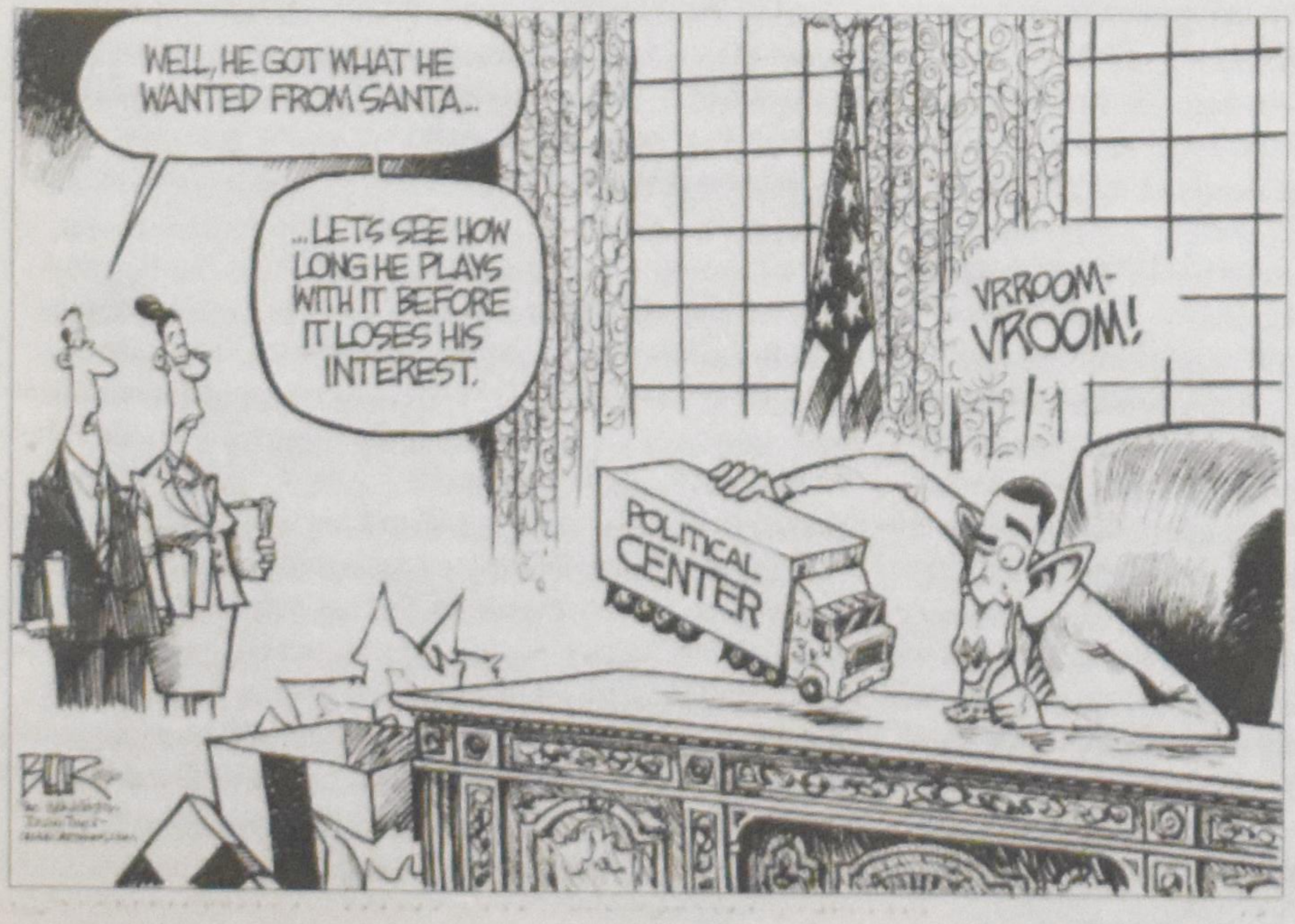
Bert Hielema, in an October column, wrote that Republicans believe they have a god-given right to pollute, citing an Iowa party platform. By not unreasonable extrapolation, he assumed that (many?) other Republican State Parties might have that same Iowa State plank in their platforms. He therefore concluded that it was a generally accepted part of Republican policy. He erred in identifying part with the whole.

For that Mr. Stanley (Letters, Dec. 13) feels slandered and implores Bert to apologize.

How curious, then, that at one point in his letter Mr. Stanley states that "we can – and should – address the risk of climate change . . . without succumbing to the no-growth radicalism."

There are many, myself included, who out of serious concern for the future of our planet have espoused the benefits of a no-growth policy. We are now summarily dismissed and branded as radicals. Have we been slandered? Is an apology in order?

Lippe C. de Haan
Exeter, Ontario



Cathy Smith appointed *CC* Features editor

ST. CATHARINES, Ont. – The Board of Reformed Faith Witness, which publishes *Christian Courier*, announces the appointment of Cathy Smith as Features Editor of *CC*, effective January 1. Smith has been a columnist for *CC* since the spring of 2010, when she was recruited to fill a vacancy left by Peter Schuurman. Her insightful writing and knowledge of the Reformed community prompted *CC* to involve Smith further as a Contributing Editor last August.

Brett Alan Dewing, Co-editor of *CC* for almost two years, resigned in December. The Board is grateful for the gifts of discernment and writing that Dewing has shared through *CC's* pages.

In our next issue, Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) will be taking over *CC's* centre spread and commentary page, which includes Q + A series and blog excerpts. She has plans to showcase original photography and poetry each issue in a space called "Artful Eye." Her column, entitled "Everyday Christian," will continue. Smith obtained her Hon. BA (English) and her B.Ed. from the University of Western Ontario and taught in the Christian school system for 24 years prior to her retirement. She lives with her husband Mark in Wyoming, Ontario.

All Scripture is inspired

William van Oene takes me to task (Dec. 13) about my observation that Luke may have put words into Mary's mouth. Many scholars argue that he has done so and he MAY have done so. My explanation was intended to indicate that no one in the ancient world would have thought Luke fraudulent and that they had a different understanding of history. Van Oene seems to be afraid that I take liberty with the inspiration of Scripture, but the writers of Scripture were inspired; so his fear that through my way of exegesis "we will ultimately lose all solid ground from under our feet" has no validity.

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, Alberta

Welcome energy

[A recent *CC*] review did a wonderful job of blending cogent analysis and personal response, and in such well crafted language.

I'm glad I decided to renew my *CC* subscription; there's a current of new life and energy running through it, a really uniquely impressive publication from within the "Dutch Diaspora."

Henry J Baron
Professor of English, Emeritus
Calvin College

Christian Courier

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News

Lutheran leader to Pope: *There were 'damaging aspects' of the Reformation*

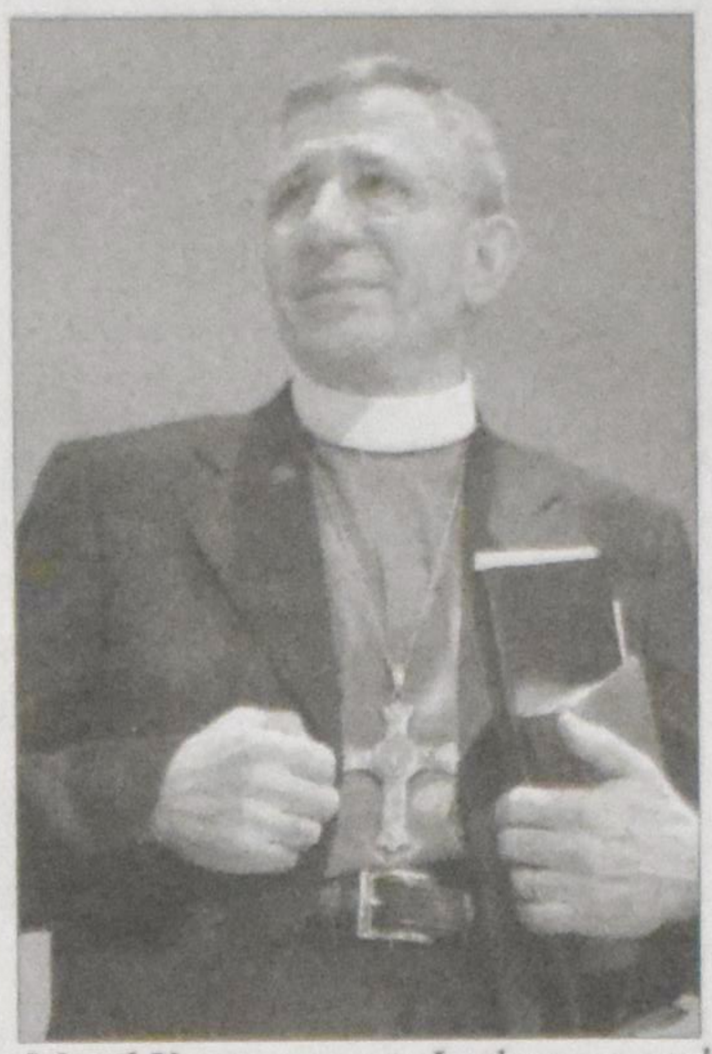
ROME (Catholic Culture) – Addressing Pope Benedict during a mid-December audience, Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan of Palestine and Jordan, the new president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), paid tribute to "the ecumenical progress of the past five decades." He praised the "joy in the liberating power of the Gospel proclaimed afresh by the Reformers." But he also asserted that there were "damaging aspects of the Reformation."

Younan noted in the title of his address that Lutherans and Roman Catholics are "called to a common vocation of witnessing to the world." He called the opportunity for an audience with the Pope "a sign that honors the remarkable developments between our churches during recent years, and a sign of our hope for what lies ahead." He noted, "Within our own lifetimes the climate of relations between Lutherans and Catholics has warmed dramatically – and this climate change has been for the good!"

Lutherans and Roman Catholics "have reached new levels of theological understanding and agreement, notably in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," said Younan. But he also wants to work together to address what he called "the injustices and idolatries exposed by the continuing global financial crisis" and toward a "common vision for a just peace in the Holy Land."

'Healing of memories'

The LWF head then turned to Luther's Reformation. At last summer's meeting, the LWF "took a memorable action to ask forgiveness from Anabaptists for the legacies of persecutions in the sixteenth century," he said. He added, "In preparing for this act, we were especially mindful of those traditions, including Catholics, who also had been persecutors. As Cardinal Kasper said to us, healing of memories with Mennonites is a common task for our communities. . . . We believe that we took this action on behalf of the whole body of Christ. We pray that this spirit of repentance, reconciliation and renewal will continue to grow among us."



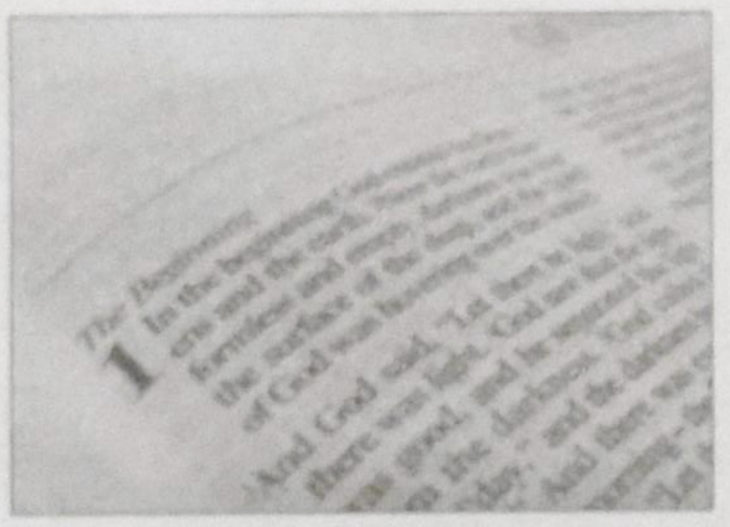
Munib Younan wants Lutherans and Catholics to witness to the world.

Younan hopes that Lutherans and Catholics will move closer to one another regarding Communion, "which Luther saw as the *summa evangelii.*" He emphasized this as "Lutherans already look toward 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation movement" – which he sees as "a test case for ecumenical relations."

"For us there is joy in the liberating power of the Gospel proclaimed afresh by the Reformers, and we will celebrate that," he said. "At the same time, we intend our anniversary to be ecumenically accountable: to recognize both damaging aspects of the Reformation and ecumenical progress since the last major Reformation anniversary. But we cannot achieve this ecumenical accountability on our own, without your help. We are called, both Lutherans and Catholics, to our common vocation of witnessing to the world for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. Thus we invite you to work together with us in preparing this anniversary, so that in 2017 we are closer to sharing in the Bread of Life than we are today."

The Lutheran World Federation consists of 145 member denominations across the globe.

Gallup: Most Americans believe God's role in Creation



PRINCETON, N.J. (CNA/Gallup) – A new Gallup survey indicates that 78 percent of Americans believe that God was involved in the development of the human race. Forty percent believe that God created us human beings in our present form within the last 10,000 years (down slightly from 44 percent in 1982). Thirty-eight percent believe that God played a role in the development of the human race over millions of years. Just 16 percent now believe in atheistic or "secular evolution," though that number is up significantly from the nine percent who admitted to that belief in 1982.

The 40 percent of Americans who hold the "creationist" view that some 10,000 years ago God created human beings as we currently are is the lowest percentage in Gallup's history of asking that question, and down from a high point of 47 percent in 1993 and 1999. There has, however, been little change over the years in the percentage holding the "theistic evolution" view that humans evolved under God's guidance.

The survey revealed that views on human origins vary significantly by level of education and religiosity. Those who are less educated are more likely to hold a creationist view. Those with university degrees and post-graduate education are more likely to hold one of the two viewpoints involving evolution.

Americans who are regular churchgoers are most likely to accept explanations for the origin of humans that involve God, not a surprising finding. Still, the creationist viewpoint is not universal even among that group. It is held by 60 percent of weekly churchgoers. But about a quarter of people who seldom or never attend church also believe the creationist view.

Implications for relation of religion/politics

There is a significantly higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats who believe a creationist view of human origins. That reflects the strong relationship between religion and politics in contemporary America. Republicans are significantly more likely to attend church weekly than are Democrats and others, and, as noted, Americans who attend church weekly are most likely to believe the creationist alternative for the origin of humans.

The vast majority of Americans believe in God, and about 85 percent have a religious identity. Gallup says it is not surprising, as a result, to find that about eight in 10 Americans hold a view of human origins that involves actions by God —that he either created humans as depicted in the book of Genesis, or guided a process of evolution. What continues to surprise many scientists is that four out of 10 Americans believe in the first of these explanations.

These views have been generally stable over the last 28 years. Acceptance of the creationist viewpoint has decreased slightly over time, with a concomitant rise in acceptance of a secular evolution perspective. But these shifts have not been large, and the basic structure of beliefs about human beings' origins is generally the same as it was in the early 1980s.

Americans' attitudes about almost anything can, and often do, have political consequences. Views on human origins are no exception. Debates and clashes over which explanations for human origins should be included in public school textbooks have persisted for decades. With 40 percent of Americans continuing to hold to anti-evolutionary beliefs, it is highly likely that these types of debates will continue, says Gallup.

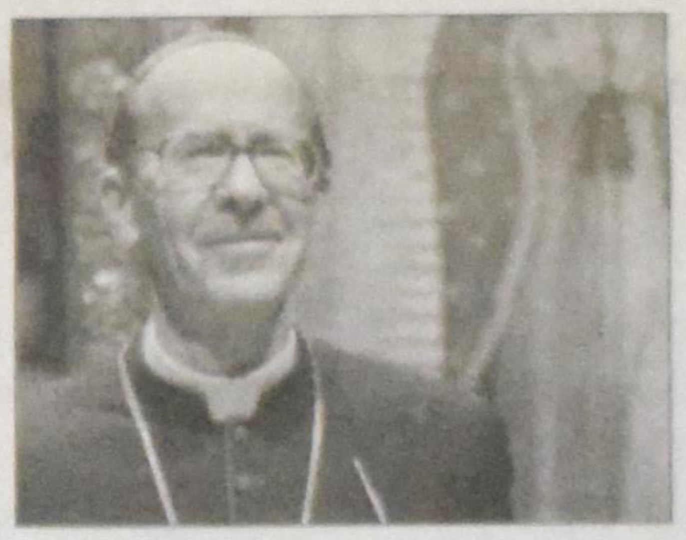
Bishop strips hospital of Catholic status over abortion, ethics

PHOENIX, Arizona (CNA/EWTN News) – Citing ongoing violations of Catholic teaching, including an instance of abortion, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix declared on Dec. 21 that St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center can no longer call itself Catholic.

The announcement came after months of ethical discussions with officials at St. Joseph's and its parent company, Catholic Healthcare West (CHW). The talks reached an impasse and Bishop Olmsted gave hospital officials a Dec. 17 deadline to reach an understanding. But, among other things, the administrators did not adequately address "the scandal caused by the abortion," said Olmstead. On the contrary, he said, the talks "only eroded my confidence about their commitment" to the church's "Ethical and Religious Directives" for Catholic Health Care Services. Those directives are standards drawn up by the conference of bishops to guide medical treatment in Catholic institutions.

St. Joseph's maintains that an abortion performed in Nov. 2009 on a woman 11 weeks pregnant was a medical necessity (she had a heart and lung condition), but Catholic teaching forbids direct and intentional abortion as the deliberate taking of innocent human life. It holds that abortion is never medically necessary or morally permissible.

A nun who served on the hospital's ethics board approved the abortion. Olmsted declared back in May 2010 that Sister Margaret McBride had incurred an automatic excommunication for her role in recommending the abortion. The bishop then set up talks with St. Joseph's, seeking repentance and a commitment to future compliance with the church's ethical guidelines.



In December a letter by Olmsted expressing his frustration was leaked to the press. "In effect, you would have me believe that we will merely have to agree to disagree," he wrote to CHW president Lloyd Dean. "But this resolution is unacceptable, because it disregards my authority and responsibility to interpret the moral law and to teach the Catholic faith as a successor of the Apostles." Olmstead concluded that St. Joseph's "is not committed to following the teaching of the Catholic Church; therefore, this hospital cannot be considered Catholic."

He also faulted the institutions' participation in the so-called "Mercy Health Plan," through which it receives government monies to provide healthcare services—including abortion, birth control and sterilization—to the poor. The bishop questioned the hospital's motivations and priorities, noting that revenues from its participation in that plan reached nearly $2 billion in 2010. For the 26 years that the plan had been in existence, he said, St. Joseph's hospital made more than $100 million a year.

St. Joseph's president Linda Hunt said the hospital was "deeply disappointed" by having its Catholic status withdrawn, but she again justified the abortion. She insisted that the hospital is continuing "through our words and deeds to carry out the healing ministry of Jesus."

With its Catholic identity stripped, St. Joseph will be forced to remove the Eucharist from its chapels and is prohibited from celebrating Mass at the hospital.

"For seven years now, I have tried to work with St. Joseph's," Bishop Olmsted said, "and I have hoped and prayed that this day would never come, that this decree would not be needed. However, the faithful of the diocese have a right to know whether institutions of this importance are indeed Catholic in identity and practice."

News

Christian Reformed Church grows in Sierra Leone

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – The Christian Reformed Church of Sierra Leone made significant progress in 2010, including the start-up of worship in new churches, land acquisition, help in constructing a handful of church buildings and plans to build a headquarters church.

Leadership training for men and for women, as well as continued emphasis on youth ministry, was also part of the denomination's forward movement in 2010. Literacy training began in four communities, and farmers were repaying loans they received in the farm program to help grow crops.

"We thank God for his grace that is sufficient for us here in Sierra Leone. God is working in us and through us," said Rev. John Phiri, co-ordinator of church development for the church in Sierra Leone in partnership with Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM).

Phiri also expressed heartfelt thanks to all who prayed and are praying for the church in Sierra Leone and donating towards its work. "Without your support, work can be very difficult, if not impossible, to be done. May God bless you," he said.

In the church building projects, five congregations have given aid. Fellow Christians provided labor and all local materials, and Phiri's office provided roofing materials and a few bags of cement. Meanwhile, Phiri said, the plans to build a headquarters church in Kabala are underway, and additional work will be done in conjunction with a group from Denver, Colorado.

The CRC's mission team in Sierra Leone was also busy in 2010 with church planting. The goal was to plant churches in the cities of Freetown and Bo.

"We thank God that we have started the work in both cities. In Freetown we have Pastor Elisha leading the initiative, while Bo is led by Pastor Mattea," explained Phiri. The average attendance in Freetown is 62, while in Bo it is 83. Land was acquired for the church in Kabala and plans are underway to acquire land in Bo and Freetown. Land in these places is relatively expensive, Phiri said.

From leadership training to better farming

With help from Rev. Ezekiel, the coordinator for training, leadership training sessions took place in partnership with

A sports event of the Christian Reformed Primary school in Kabala.

the Timothy Leadership Training Institute which is based at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The leadership training included sessions on lay preaching, caring for God's people, and the Reformed perspective of salvation and stewardship.

Mussu, the women's training coordinator, in conjunction with Rev. Ezekiel, also conducted leadership training. Seventy-seven women leaders attended. "The women's ministry also successfully held an annual conference in January 2010 and over 100 women attended," noted Phiri. The church's youth movement is growing strong with the leadership of Pastor Maxwell. Since January 2010, the youth, too, have been given basic training in Christian leadership and how fellowships are organized.

The CRC in Sierra Leone has a partnership with the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria. That "is a big blessing to the upcoming church here in Sierra Leone," said Phiri. "We have enjoyed the training of our leaders here together with the Nigerian church."

In 2010 four communities also started adult literacy classes. "We hope that they can be able to read the Bible in their own mother tongue," Phiri said.

Finally, a previously established family farm program is continuing successfully, and currently the church is recovering loans provided to boost agriculture and help family farms. The manager, Michael, and his field workers are a very hardworking team, said Phiri. "Though we have had challenges, we thank God for his Holy Spirit, who gives us power to overcome the challenges in the spreading of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," Phiri exclaimed.

Priest: Muslim extremists want to rid Middle East of Christians

CAIRO, Egypt (CNA) – An Egyptian priest says that radical Muslims are trying to entirely rid the Middle East of Christians, who for many centuries comprised the largest religious group in the region.

Egyptian spokesman Fr. Rafic Greische told Vatican Radio, "They want the Christians to evacuate from the Middle East and leave. And this is what is happening every day." He expressed frustration that governments throughout the region, not noted for their responsiveness to popular concerns, "do not take serious action to relieve or solve these problems."

Egyptian Christians face significant public and private discrimination, including policies that make it nearly impossible for them to build churches. In November 2010 a crowd demonstrating for their right to build a church in Giza clashed with police, who fired on the unarmed protesters. More than 150 people, including some children, remain in jail following that incident.

Egypt is well known for police brutality and other human rights abuses. While Christians have difficulty even finding a place to worship, some Egyptian Muslims express their antipathy against the country's Christians. They "become violent and make demonstrations," often burning pictures of the head of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church, said Fr. Greische. They're particularly offended, he noted, by "people who become Christians. [Christian converts] can expect not only ostracism but death threats. And Christians who dare to evangelize Egyptian Muslims can expect violent retribution if their work becomes known.

Fr. Greische said an October suicide attack at Iraq's Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation that killed almost 60 worshipers at a Sunday Mass gave rise to a climate of fear among Christians throughout the region. "We have police all around our churches," he told Vatican Radio. "It's as if we are in a fortress." That made for a difficult Advent and Christmas season. Yet within churches that may feel like fortresses, Egyptian Christians have a deeper source of security, he said: "Jesus, who is with us through all these difficulties. That we have!"

Mass one week after the terrorist attacks at Our Lady of Salvation.

Did you know that . . .

* more CRC congregations are pursuing "God's justice."
* One in five pastors does not feel a strong sense of fit with his or her congregation.
* Older pastors are far more likely to report daily devotions than younger ones.
* Fewer pastors are attending continuing education programs, probably due to the poor economy.
* Pastors in Canada and the U.S. see their congregations as generally reflecting the mission of the CRCNA.

Survey: CRC pastors want more feedback

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – Christian Reformed Church councils could have a more positive impact on, and show significant support for, their ministers by providing regular feedback on their preachers' sermons, according to a recently released Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) survey. It also found that 10 percent of pastors reported they wouldn't want to be a pastor if they were to start their careers over (up from five percent in 2005); that the frequency of personal prayer and devotions by pastors has remained steady; and that 72 percent of pastors surveyed came into the ministry through Calvin Theological Seminary.

"We're very excited to have the final SPE survey report completed. It takes the information gathered from two earlier SPE surveys, along with the current findings, to create much rich data," said Lis Van Harten, director of the CRC's SPE program. "Not only will SPE have valuable information to consider but so will many others, such as the seminary, councils, pastors and anyone who works with pastors. The report is thorough and easy to read. There truly is something for everyone in its pages," Van Harten said.

Two of the surveys were conducted on paper but the most recent one was done via the Internet. The SPE project began in 2003 and has been funded by grants from the Lilly Endowment fund.

The project has focused on helping pastors via peer learning, mentoring and continuing education. Conferences and peer groups for pastors' spouses, and learning sessions for pastors and their spouses together, have also been part of the project.

The picture revealed in the three waves of surveys since 2004-2005 is of a "generally healthy clergy that is holding its ground on several important measures of sustainability, including vocational satisfaction, spousal support and personal life balance," said Neil Carlson, who helped conduct the survey.

He added, however, that "at any given time, there are dozens of pastors who are seriously struggling in ministry. We conducted some statistical analyses that suggest a couple [of] key levers to pull: one is boosting leadership skills. Changes in self-assessed pastoral leadership skills are strongly related to increases in pastoral health. Another is council support in general and systematic preaching feedback in particular."

The survey also found that pastors are discipling "mature Christians" more often than they are teaching "pre-Christian or new Christian" disciples. On that subject one pastor commented, "As I reflect on my main challenge as a pastor in an established church, it is managing the tension between discipling and caring for church members. . . . Often I feel alone in this tension in our church as a person who believes that mission is first biblical and essential, then practical."

In addition, while the majority of pastors are doing well, there "are significant numbers of pastors and churches that are in pain or in crisis." The current study revealed pastors "who are dissatisfied with their current pastorate, [and who] frequently feel isolated in their ministry." Yet "on average, the CRCNA's pastors and churches appear to be weathering hard times well – at least they tell us they are doing so!"

Columns

Technically Speaking
Derek Schuurman

Kuyper and computers in Nicaragua

As I was entering the last month of my sabbatical, an opportunity arose for my Dad and I to travel to Nicaragua with Worldwide Christian Schools (WWCS). The focus of the trip was to offer various workshops and assist with refurbishing a load of donated computers. The visit was co-ordinated with the Nehemiah Center in Managua, where a former student of mine, David Stienstra, is currently working as a partner missionary. He provides computer and media technology assistance. Two themes emerged over the 10 days of our visit. First, the strong interest within educational communities in a Biblical worldview and its application to computer technology. Secondly, the keen interest in free and open source software.

Those of us who are dyed-in-the-wool Reformed folk and who grew up attending established Christian schools sometimes don't appreciate the riches of our heritage. We are accustomed to the Biblical themes of creation, fall, and redemption, and phrases such as "every square inch" are familiar. But when one travels to places like Nicaragua or Africa where fledgling Christian schools and teachers are still getting established, this transforming vision is still taking shape.

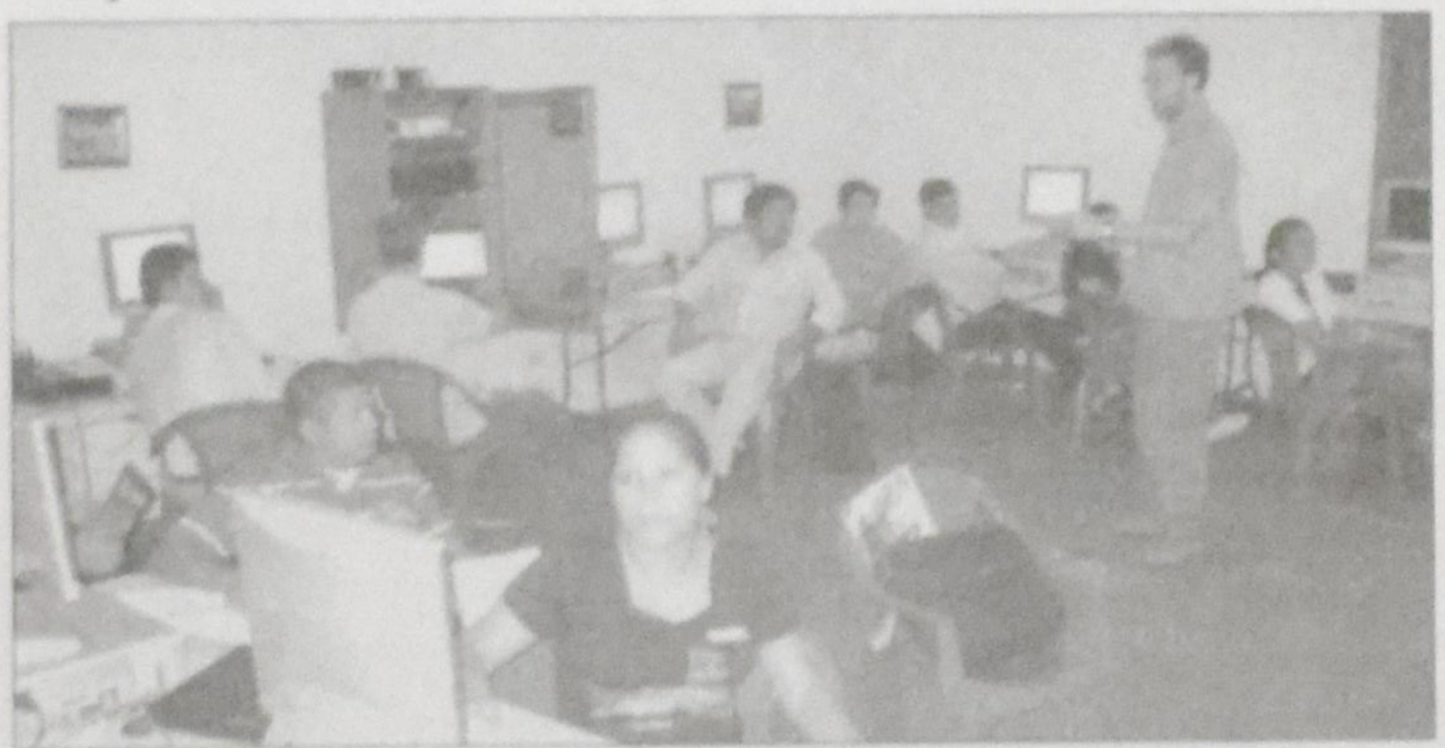
Interest in this topic became apparent when I gave a two-day workshop for Christian school teachers at the Nehemiah Center. The workshop comprised an introduction to a Biblical worldview of computer technology along with some practical training. Over lunch we asked the teachers what they found most helpful, and they replied that it was hearing the Christian perspective of computer technology. Despite the nifty hands-on training, I suspect this Christian perspective was the most valuable thing I could share.

I also spent some time at the Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería (National University of Engineering) in Managua, where I gave a series of talks organized by the local Christian student group on campus. With the help of a translator, I gave a talk entitled "Responsible Technology" which introduced a Biblical view of technology and the notion of design norms and its implications for those who work in the field of technology. A professor shared with me that this was the first time she had even thought about some of the questions that were raised. She was encouraged to hear about how Christian faith is not separate from work in computer science.

A Microsoft alternative

The second theme that emerged was the keen interest and potential for open source software, which can be freely distributed and shared. One of the technology design norms I had introduced was the norm of *cultural appropriateness*, which involves making design decisions that take into account the context, users and setting in which computer technology will be used. There is a link between worldview and the technology choices we make. In places like Nicaragua, open source software provides numerous opportunities for local engineers and software developers to give shape to their own software and to develop appropriate technology. In addition, open source software reduces the dependence on expensive proprietary software in a country which is one of the poorest in Central America. It also reduces the temptation to rely on pirated software.

Open source software also proved to be appropriate technology as we spent several days refurbishing a large pile of donated "vintage" computers for local Christian schools. We installed Ubuntu Linux, a free operating system which runs well on older hardware and is immune to Windows viruses. Computer viruses are often a large headache for teachers, requiring ongoing maintenance and limiting the use of USB flash drives which propagate computer viruses in class rooms. Ubuntu Linux also proved appropriate because it supports a wide variety of free educational software programs with excellent Spanish language support. We gave out Ubuntu CDs and encouraged people to share them freely (and legally) with everyone. One of the principles of free software is "helping your neighbour," something which Christians can enthusiastically embrace, especially in places where the digital divide is abundantly evident.



Hands-on teacher workshop at Nehemiah center used open source software.

Teacher workshop participants appreciated a Christian perspective.

In Nicaragua, people are moved by a comprehensive Biblical worldview. Are we still moved by this transforming vision in our own schools? What does appropriate technology look like in our context? The exciting work of Christian education and cultural transformation remains an ongoing task no matter where we live, in Nicaragua or here at home.

Derek Schuurman (dschuur@csredeemer.ca) teaches computer science at Redeemer University College. He traveled with his Dad to Nicaragua with Worldwide Christian Schools Canada to do some computer work and offer workshops. You can read more about the trip on Dave Stienstra's blog site at http://dstien.blogspot.com/.

2011

Principalities & Powers
David T. Koyzis

The year of our Lord

Over the millennia civilizations have counted years in different ways. An especially common way to number years in the past was to start at the accession of a king or queen, as seen in more than one biblical text (e.g., 1 Kings 14:25, 15:1; 2 Chronicles 16:1). By this reckoning Canadians are living at the end of the 59th year of the reign of Elizabeth.

Several numbering methods have their roots in ancient religious faiths. According to the Jewish calendar we are living in the year 5771 after the creation of the world. The Eastern Orthodox similarly counted the years from creation, but they came up with a different number based on the genealogies recorded in the Greek Septuagint version of Genesis. By Byzantine reckoning the current year, which began in September, is 7518. This calendar was used in Russia until Peter the Great some three centuries ago.

Last month saw the beginning of the Muslim new year, which is numbered 1432, the current era beginning with Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. Southeast Asian Buddhists identify this year as 2554, counting from the death of Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha.

The Christian manner of numbering years began with the Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century of our era, although it did not come into general usage until sometime later. Dionysius calculated – not altogether correctly, as it turned out – back to the birth of Jesus Christ and renumbered the years following this event. Since this pivotal calendar reform, "the year of our Lord," or *Anno Domini* (AD), has come to prefix the years after Christ's birth, while "before Christ" (BC) is added as a suffix to the earlier years.

Due to the global influence of European civilization, this numbering has become nearly universal. Alternative dating systems pose no real threat. Counting the years from creation is a nonstarter, because no one can agree when this occurred, even if one takes literally the patriarchal ages listed in Genesis. Thus virtually everyone on earth calls this year 2011.

Christ as linchpin

But what of those who do not confess Christ? Should they be expected to use AD and BC to number years? The use of the terms "Common Era" (CE) and "Before the Common Era" (BCE) dates back to the 18th century and has increased in popularity since then, at least in some fields. In archeology and biblical studies, for example, it is now common practice to add CE or BCE to the end of dates, as in 1453 CE or 587 BCE. My wife and I saw this on historical markers during our travels in Israel and the Occupied Territories a decade and a half ago.

The principal argument in favour of this usage is that it is more inclusive of those following other religions by allowing them to use the current year numbers without naming Christ. However well-intended this effort at inclusivity may be, I do not find it persuasive. After all, the event that makes the past 2,011 years the Common Era is precisely the birth of Jesus Christ, not Muhammad's flight to Medina or the birth of the Buddha. Despite the best efforts of some to hide the Christian belief that the coming of Christ into the world is the turning point in human history, the mere fact that the Common Era begins when it does is powerful testimony, even for those who do not acknowledge him, to the centrality of Jesus Christ.

Despite the canons of contemporary scholarship, I will continue to use AD and BC in my own writing. If, as Abraham Kuyper said, every "square inch in the whole domain of our human existence" finds its meaning in Christ, this is one small way to acknowledge that reality.

Welcome to *Anno Domini* 2011.

David T. Koyzis (david.t.koyzis@hotmail.com) teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario.

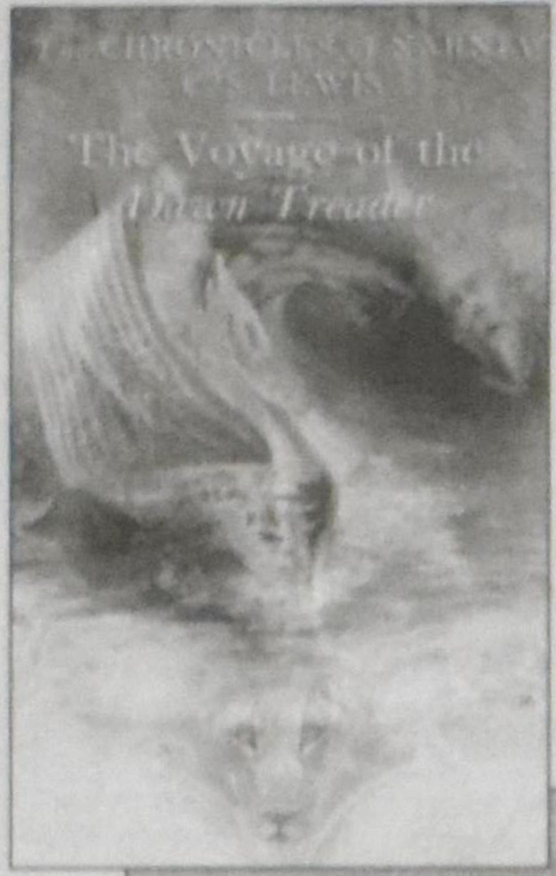
Reviews

Treading the Dawn with old friends:
Narnia returns

Brett Alan Dewing

This review assumes you've read C. S. Lewis's The Voyage of the Dawn Treader at least once.

The new film adaptation of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, third in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, is like Lewis rewritten by John Eldredge. Both men are among my favorite writers, and while this film isn't 100 percent spectacular, it is a spectacle at times and a parable at others, all adding up to a good film.



So, what do I mean by saying it seems rewritten by John Eldredge? *Dawn Treader* is a picaresque novel drawn from the imagery of Psalm 139 ("If I travel on the wings of the dawn to the far side of the sea, even there, you will be with me." – Dewing Paraphrase). The producers of the film decided, with some acumen, that this type of story might not enthuse today's youth. And indeed, it might not. I can attest that for me and my friends, we shared a communal nostalgia for the book that may belie that theory.

But, whether it was a good move or not, the film version of Lewis's book takes some liberties with the plot. Some are minor: the conflation of Deathwater Island and Dragon Island makes sense. Others are substantial: the Dark Island where dreams come true morphs here into the big bad, a locus of evil that sends magical tendrils of green mist across the ocean, creating a centralized threat for our heroes to counter. At first, this device struck me as sacrilege, but by the end, I could appreciate the narrative tie that it provided.

The thematic tie woven through the episodic adventures is straight out of Eldredge's books: the journey of a boy to learn that he has what it takes and a girl to learn that she is lovely. The boy and girl are, of course, Edmund and Lucy, portrayed aptly by a well-aged Georgie Henley and Skander Keynes. They are joined again by Ben Barnes's pretty boy Caspian (compare him to the BBC Prince Caspian for a good laugh and commentary on cultural difference) and the exemplary Will Poulter as whiny git, aka cousin, Eustace Scrubb.

Viewers of the last two Disney-produced *Narnia* films (*Dawn Treader* is not a Disney production) will know that they place a strong emphasis on action and battle scenes. The book is largely lacking in these, and so the final showdown at Dark Island (here placed further East than Ramandu's Island and Aslan's Table) becomes a long fight with a truly revolting sea serpent (you may recall the small episode of the sea serpent from the novel). If the plot is Lewis rewritten by Eldredge, the sea serpent is Ray Harryhausen redesigned by David Cronenberg. Yes, yechh.

The film provides many fine moments, though. Lucy is given a chance to evoke her eight-year-old self entering Narnia for the first time. Eustace-cum-dragon and Reepicheep (who gets his Dobby moment right at the end) bond touchingly. There is a scene with Lucy and the beautifying spell that indirectly but expertly paints a picture of the dangers of pornography. Of course, the previews show us that Jadis and Susan and Peter show up briefly in welcome but unnecessary cameos.

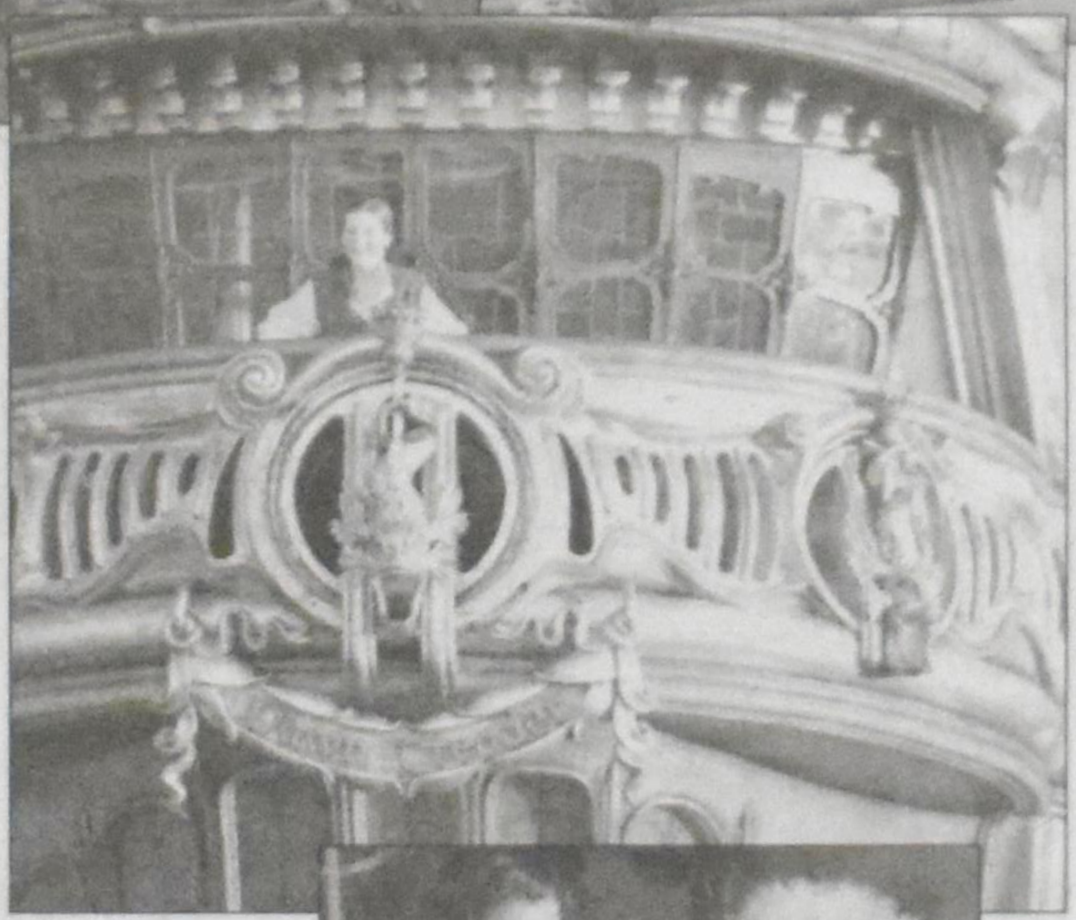
Sadly, one of the best images in the entire *Narnia* series, the Undressing of Eustace, is rushed through, but Poulter pulls off such a convincing and affecting character arc that I almost didn't mind. In the film, Eustace remains a dragon until the end of the conflict at Dark Island, and this departure from the novel proves a revealing chance for us to see the change in his character take place over an extended period more believable in a cinema context.

The look of the film is gorgeous. The ship itself is beyond beautiful, full of tapestries of Narnian history and ornate carving. The sets are varied and fantastic. 3D is used subtly, making Aslan's ultimate appearance awe-inspiring. There are some great effects, including the brilliant shooting of the children's return to England. After the movie, I rushed to Toys 'R Us to find replicas of the ship, but strangely, no toys seem to have been produced (a troubling trend I first encountered after *The Owls of Ga'Hoole*). I would love a foot-long version of the immaculate Dawn Treader and a book of the interiors to stare at for long periods.

All in all, after I let the film be its own animal, I liked that animal very much indeed. Lucy and Edmund have grown up well as actors and characters, and I was over-the-top thrilled by Poulter's Eustace. By the time they reached the Utter East and looked over into Aslan's Country, I was almost tearing up. What enduring images old Clive Staples left for us! I hope this film opens those images up for a new generation of children. For me, the effect of the original book on me and my friends was clear when the end credits rolled with the original illustrations. It was a moment of pure and glorious nostalgia that capped a well-done film.

Despite hints at the end of the movie, poor box office receipts may cause the *Narnia* films to end here, but I urge Hollywood to give *The Silver Chair* a chance. A done-in-one, mythic adventure, it would prove to be the most adaptable of the series. Here's hoping we get to find out.

Brett Dewing, a poet, playwright and critic, blogs at undergroundrainbow.blogspot.com/.



Sacrifices of one kind devalue those of another:
my thoughts on *The Dawn Treader*

Walter Miedema

I went into the experience of watching *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* expecting to be disappointed, and I was, but not remotely to the extent that I had expected. I hated *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* because it clearly wanted to be another *Lord of the Rings* type blockbuster and refused to see *Prince Caspian* on the basis of my hatred for the previous movie. But this one I just had to see. Of the seven books in C.S. Lewis's masterpiece *Chronicles, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* has always been my favourite. For that reason I couldn't let a theatre experience pass me by.

Another reason this movie had to work hard to gain my approval is that I grew up watching the BBC versions produced in the late 1980s and 1990. These productions were faithful to the books, and while their mixture of puppets, live action and two dimensional animation is obviously dated and perhaps overly theatrical, they remain close to my heart. I can forgive them their shortcomings because there is a distinct lack of Hollywood meddling in the way they've been produced.

That being said, I enjoyed this film and could at least understand why some of the plot changes were made. Because of the episodic nature of the book it allowed for a re-ordering of the episodes that allowed for a smoother, condensed story flow. In my opinion, while the movie doesn't suffer much from this rearrangement, the reordering is unnecessary and possibly confuses the central theme of the story. These changes also confuse slightly the story's relationship to the epics Lewis emulates – books such as the *Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor* and more obviously, *The Odyssey*.

Another unnecessary change is the addition of the presence of a strange green fog that the film uses to suggest the embodiment of an external evil force. The fog is first seen enveloping and devouring a number of people, and the central quest of the film becomes destroying this evil and rescuing its victims.

Beyond adding an unnecessary plot complication (the search for the missing lords of Narnia, as well as the drive to explore the unknown, was enough to drive the book as well as the BBC version), the presence of the fog shifts the presence of evil in the lives of the characters from an internal, to an external one. Evil becomes something they fight communally through a series of added requirements (what does collecting swords really have to do with fighting evil?) and less something that each of the characters is individually tempted by. By claiming that the temptations – Lucy's desire for beauty, for example – are encouraged or even caused by external force, the story is somewhat robbed of its allegorical significance. The islands encountered on the trip allow for encounters with deadly sins and temptations that are to be wrestled with in the heart, not in laying siege to an island that is toying with the characters' minds.

That being said, the time-line adjustments do allow for a deeper examining of some of the temptations faced (Lucy's desire for beauty again comes to mind). However this does not become a warning against envy but an encouragement to value the self. Whether the original story itself allows for this is debatable.

Another time-line change that may be jarring to those familiar with the book is the length of time that Eustace Scrubb remains a dragon. The episode in the book is quite distinct, and his condition, while it proves useful, is mostly an inconvenience to him. Eustace's eventual transformation back into a boy loses some of its poignancy in the fact that it is placed within the climactic conflict between the Narnians and the evil green fog. Also lost is the actual physical contact between Aslan and Eustace required to return him to his human form. For me Lewis's description of this encounter remains one of the best allegorical representations of the violent side of Christ's redemptive work with in us. The way it is represented in the film seems to attempt to intensify this moment, but the lack of physical contact (though visually beautiful) weakens the act itself.

Those who have not read the book will be fully able to watch this film, but reading the book is highly recommended, especially for those young enough to have a growing imagination yet old enough to read.

The acting is for the most part good. Simon Pegg's voicing of Reepicheep in particular is distinguished, and not distracting from the character. The use of visual effects, while dazzling, does not overwhelm the story. See this movie, but in no way let it stop you from reading the book.

Walter Miedema is a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary currently working, living and writing in Vancouver.

Features

Love is…

(a New Year's resolution we can all make)

Jon Dykstra

Love is a mostly misunderstood word – it's mistaken for sex, for sentimentality, for some sort of chemical thing that just happens, or doesn't, and either lasts forever, or doesn't. Some think it's effortless. Some even think it can be bought for money.

Christians, too, are confused. We know love is more than sex, more than sentimentality and more than chemistry, but most of us are still trying to figure out whether love is a feeling or an action!

So what is love then? God tells us that love is…

… sacrificial

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

Some misunderstand love as a math formula, where things are supposed to work out evenly on both sides of the equation: if you give a friend a thoughtful present, you should be able to count on getting one in return; if you give your spouse a backrub, they should get up and make you coffee; tit for tat, back and forth, even steven. But Christ demonstrated the complete inequity of real love – he loved us, so he gave himself up for us, even though, in return, we can offer him nothing. Loving is giving with no thought of getting.

… something you do

"Let us not love in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Love is more than a feeling, more than an attraction, more than arousal or sentimentality. Love is expressed in what we do for one another. We can say we love our brother, but if we won't visit him when he's lonely or help him when he is troubled, there is no love. Love is an action.

… not a duty to be performed

"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3).

Doing is not enough – it's not enough to give to the poor, go to church twice each Sunday and read the Bible regularly if we are not doing this out of our love for God. A daughter can take her aging father to medical appointments, help him with his shopping and pop by regularly for a cup of coffee, but this, by itself, isn't love – the very same tasks could be done by hired staff. Love is more than just a verb. A husband can play the part of a loving spouse – he can do all the right things, but love is more than just action, more than just duty. Love is an attitude.

… not God

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8).

The Beatles got it backwards when they sang, "All you need is love." All we need is God, and while God is indeed love, that doesn't make the reverse true – love isn't God. The Beatles aren't the only ones to get it backwards though. Our society is in love with love, and they pursue it no matter what the cost. Love, they insist, is the only way to bring meaning to our lives so it must be pursued no matter what the cost. Affairs, naturally, have become commonplace; if love is a god, nothing should stand in the way of it, not vows, not spouses, not family. Instead of pursuing the God who is love, our society pursues love itself and has made an idol of it. But love is not God.

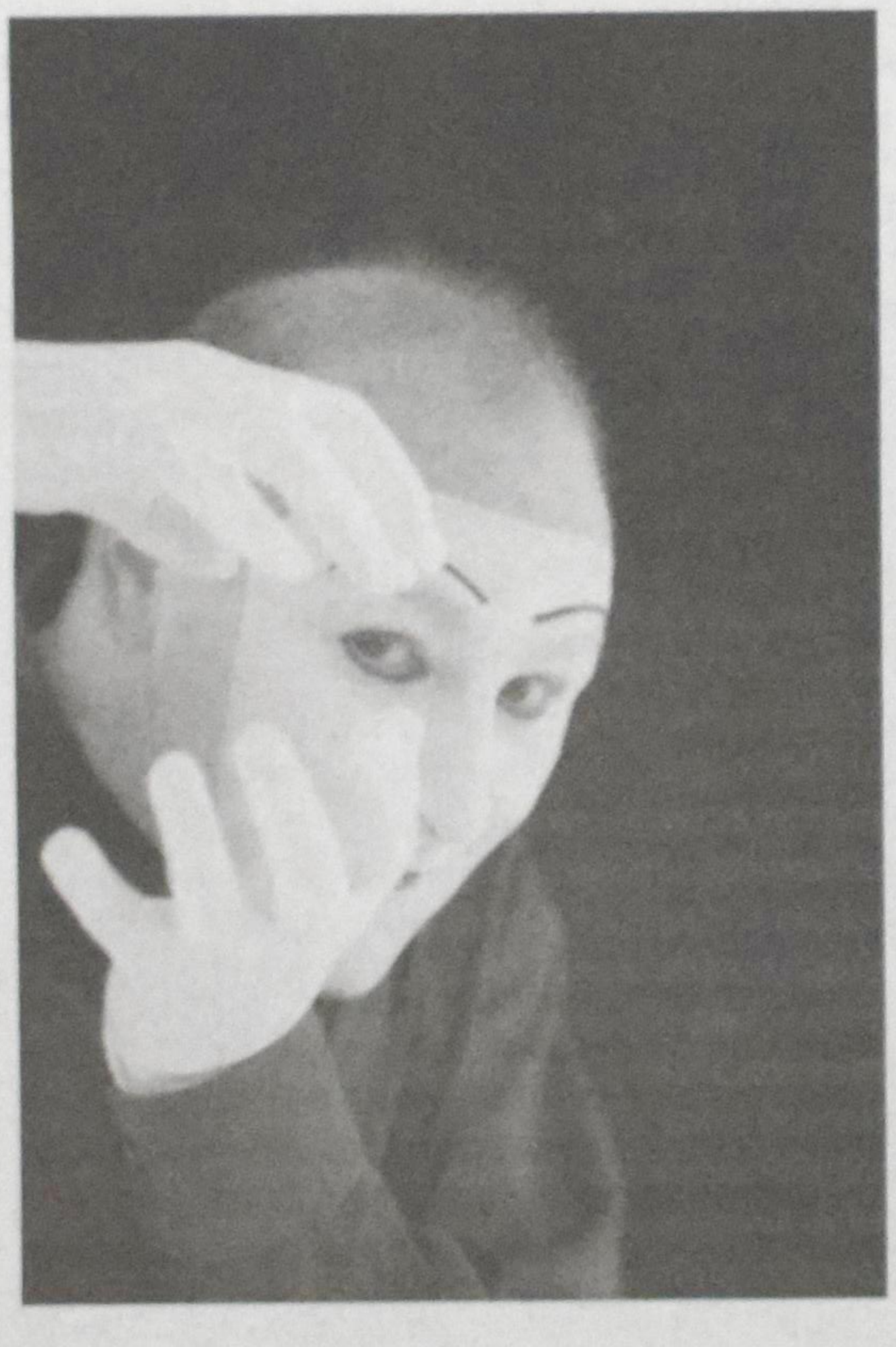
… from God

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God commands us to love our neighbour, and it's a command most of us find easy to do. Or at least easy to do with old Mrs. Todd, our next-door neighbour who bakes cookies for us every Thanksgiving. But this command isn't as easy to obey with that neighbor two doors down, who always steals our parking spot. Or the guy right next door who leaves beer cans on our lawn. Love these guys? Maybe we would, if only they were a bit more lovable. But of course, the love God is commanding here is of a more godly sort – the love that comes from him. We need to humbly remember that we love, only because God loved us first. He, after all, didn't love us because we had first in some way earned or prompted his love. No, he loved us first, sending his Son to die for us even while we were his enemies. And it is because he loved us first, that we can now love him, and our neighbor. Love comes from God

Jon Dykstra (penguineditor@gmail.com) is the husband of one, the father of one, and the uncle of forty-one. He is the editor of Reformed Perspective.

Carlos Martínez *mime actor*



Calvin Seerveld

Perhaps the most important mime in Europe these days is the Spaniard Carlos Martínez. He has performed for more than 25 years in over 30 countries. Gesture is practically a worldwide language, and mime speaks without the strain of verbal translation.

Recently Carlos has put in German words his personal reflections (*Desde el camerino*) about the art work of performing as a mime. Carlos quietly talks about painting on the mask in his dressing room before a performance, speaking without words to his cosmetic tools on a red towel as silent friends, as the tension of stage fright mutates into waiting time to step out onto the stage. Together they are going to make invisible realities visible.

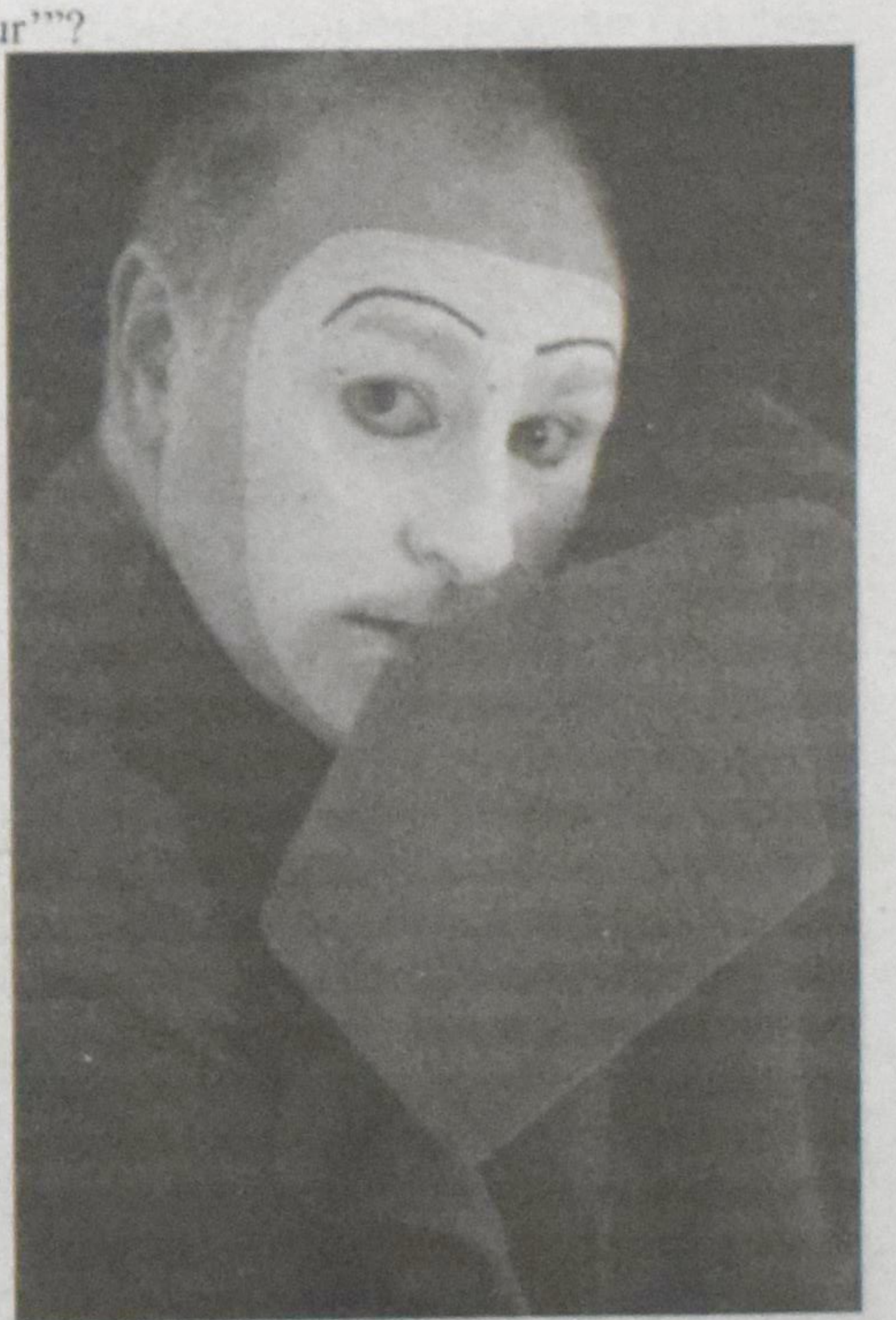
The mime's **mask** is like the white gown of a bride dressed for the wedding ceremony. The mime's mask distances a person for the occasion from one's ordinary life and appearance, and gives the facial gestures, especially the outlined eyes, white-gloved hand and nimble feet, the focussed presence of forthright symbolic meaning.

It takes a concentrated hour in the privacy of his dressing room to put on the exacting pantomime mask. After the performance it is Carlos' practise to wipe off the mask with his red towel in front of the audience, in 10 seconds, to show he is also a normal person. In daily life persons often wear masks they cannot wipe off in 10 seconds, reflects Carlos.

Pantomime artists are not "**hypocrites**," but turn ordinary body language into suggestion-rich knowledge, and make it available to anybody. Nobody is illiterate in watching pantomime. The artistically crafted silent gesture of the mime helps an attentive audience hear the many unspoken voices in the reservoir of silence: deep misery, whimsical joys, human cunning, sudden surprise.

Carlos has a program called "Human Rights," another program on "My Bible," another program on what is "Hand Made." Of course we will practice being mimes in heaven, Carlos once told me with a smile. "What else could it mean in Revelation 8:1, '...there was silence in heaven for about half an hour'"?

This little book by Carlos Martínez, *Ungeschminkte Weisheiten, Aus der Garderobe des Lebens* (NeukirchenerVerlagsgesellschaft, 2009), ISBN 978-3-7615-5729-7 [English translation in preparation for 2011], is a publishing artwork: generous white space framing black print with red subtitles; close-up colour photography by Bernd Eidenmüller, with aphoristic comment. The whole product is gentle, ingenuous, and very wise. It reminds me of Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's book of years ago (1933), *In Praise of Shadows.* For more background visit www.carlosmartinez.es



A supplementary reading can be found in C. Seerveld,"The meaning of silence for daily life and Sunday worship," *In the Fields of the Lord, a Seerveld Reader,* ed. Craig Bartholomew (Toronto Tuppence Press, 2000), 294-307. www.seerveld.com/tuppence.html

Calvin Seerveld is an emeritated (not "marinated") teacher of philosophical aesthetics from the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto.

A special gift of joy

Lini Grol

We often forget the gifts we have given or received, but one day my friend Marga told me about one gift that she will never forget.

She was a WWII nurse in Holland in early 1944 when she received a beautiful box of chocolate, of a famous trademark.

This was a delicacy very few people could afford, for it was only sold at ludicrous prices on the black-market.

Of course she was delighted, and she could hardly wait to show this exclusive box of chocolate to her mother and siblings. (Her father was then a P.O.W. of the Nazis.)

Marga was the oldest of seven children, and her siblings – knowing Marga's generosity – right away laid claim on their share of that box of chocolates.

Betty and Tilly asked in one voice for the silk ribbon around the large box, while twelve-year-old Peter demanded the box when empty for his collection of sports cards. Lisa and Trudy wanted the hard candies. Carry, their toddler sister, only pointed and said, "sweets," for that was all she could say.

Marga listened to their arguments about their part of the box of chocolate and said, amused, to her mother, "Just listen to them, they have divided my box before it is opened."

They howled in disappointed when Marga calmly placed the box on the sideboard saying, "For the time being we will only admire it, for I will only open it when Dad comes home. Now forget about this box and go back to your homework or play."

Baby Carry pouted and babbled unknown words when she followed Dora and Trudy to play, but Peter shouted belligerently,

"That Liberation better come soon; else, these chocolates will be rotten!" before he slammed the door shut with joyful force.

Marga shook her head and smiled when her mother said with an understanding chuckle, "Ach, it has been so long since they have had any sweets." Marga shrugged and said, "Though Peter is right, Liberation better come soon, for I too crave those sweets and don't want them to get spoiled."

A beautiful anticipation

Marga and her Mother talked about their hope and expectations about the war, how long yet before it would end and Dad would be home. They both thought of the years of the enslavement of so many by the Nazis..

For weeks that box stood there for all to admire. It held a promise for that special treat when Dad would come home. Everyone looked forward to Liberation Day – and not only for those chocolates.

Even visitors looked at that pretty box that had become a great conversation piece, for somehow it made them talk more positively about the future. They all wanted to believe that the war soon would end and that their life would be back to normal. However, it was not to be that soon, and life became more difficult day by day.

Yet when Marga's mother and siblings looked at that pretty box, it became to them a little light of hope, for just looking and talking of these sweets made them glad, and that pretty box was very special to them....

Oma's birthday

One day as they sat around the table, Marga talked about their Oma, who lived farther away in a seniors' home and was about to celebrate her eightieth birthday. They loved Oma and normally would all go to visit her, but some of their bikes had been traded for food, and one had been taken by the Nazis. What could they give Oma for this crowning birthday? What could they do or give to make Oma happy, besides making pretty cards for her? They all made suggestions, but even if they had had the money they could not buy anything, for the stores were empty.

Then Marga pointed at the box of chocolate. "Let's give Oma our pretty box of chocolate. She will love it. It makes no sense to hang on to it, for once we are free, we can again buy lots of chocolate. But now all we have is this box of candy to make Oma happy." Her mother nodded at her, but her siblings stared up at her, perplexed.

Then they burst out in protest. "No chocolates for us? None? You cannot give away *our* box! We have waited so long for the chocolate!"

Speechlessly, Marga and their mom stared at them and at each other.

Seeing their mother's and Marga's faces, they felt silent. Then one after the other suggested, "Maybe Oma does not like chocolates. Maybe she can't eat hard candies. Maybe Oma is on a diet."

Magda knew that normally they would have gladly given the chocolates to their Oma. The war and their deprivation of everything good in life had made them greedy.

Marga listened patiently and assured them. "Oma loves chocolate, and she is not on a diet. She will be ever so glad with the pretty box, and she will tell her friends that she got it from all of us, and she will be so proud of you."

Now they laughed out loud knowing that Oma was proud of them, and one after the other shouted cheerfully, "Yes, let's give Oma that box of chocolates."

Then they huddled around Marga to watch her wrap up their much-prized box. Each gave their self-made pretty birthday card for Oma to go with the box.

A tour of Holland

A few days later, after their meagre meal they sat around the table and their mother told them about Oma's Thank You letter.

"Let Marga read her letter to you, for after all it was her box in the beginning."

They nodded and smiled at each other when Marga read:

"My dearest ones,

What a surprise to get that lovely box of chocolate, and all your pretty cards, the one even prettier than the next. I have set them out on my bookcase to show them to my friends. They all say that I am lucky to have such a loving family. Indeed I am lucky to have you all thinking of me and spoiling me. I am ever so proud of you. Thank you. May God always bless you with kindness in your heart. I can hardly wait to see you. I love you.

Huggs and kisses for each one of you,

Your Oma."

They all nodded. It felt good knowing that Oma was proud of them, but Tilly muttered softly, looking up at Marga. "I hope she saves the ribbon for me," she said, and Betty said hastily "And me!"

Peter said, loud enough for all to hear, "We should have asked her to keep the empty box and ribbons for us."

Marga assured them: "I am sure Oma will save the box and the ribbons, and maybe even some chocolates for you. You know she is very generous and always saves things for you."

However, Oma had more children and grandchildren, and by that time the war had made life even more severe for everyone. The rations on the coupons were becoming smaller and were often sold out.

Day by day, life became more difficult, and that box of candy became more valuable, for it could be traded for much needed items, like food or clothing.

In the meantime, that pretty box went from one of Oma's children to the next.

No one ever opened that box, nor traded it for food. Each wanted to make their sibling happy with that special gift and help them with something to trade for food.

Over the next months, that box traveled all over Holland and eventually came back to Marga for her birthday on the very last day of the war.

Opening the box!

But they did not know the war was ending that day. Everybody knew that it was close but feared that something awful could happen at any time.

Therefore Magda did not open her pretty box on her birthday.

She decided to save it for that special day of Dad's homecoming, to celebrate with these sweets that were all they had to make a feast....

Glory be, the next day the liberators came, and finally Holland was free! It was a great moment when Dad came home, and after excited shouts, hugs and kisses, Mom and Dad sat with them around the table while Marga took out her box. They all watched with shining eyes how Marga slowly, almost solemnly opened her beautiful box of chocolates.

They all hung on the table to be close to her, their mouths watering as they all watched, for now finally they would have chocolates.

She carefully undid the ribbon and the shiny cellophane around the box, then opened the lid and removed the last protective cover from the chocolates.

They gasped and withdrew and cried out in dismay. They were rotten! Their precious chocolates were spoiled.

The adults burst out in laughter, but the children ran in disgust from the room.

They ran outside, where they almost at once forgot the chocolates when they saw the celebrating crowds in the streets and heard the band.

"And yet," said Marga with a twinkle in her eyes, "Just think of how many more people have been made happy by that box than if we would have eaten the candies when I brought that box home."

At family gatherings, everyone relishes telling their story of that box. It always causes gales of laughter, and sometimes thoughtful silences and tearful smiles.

Today we can afford buying the biggest boxes of candy, but none can ever give us such pride and joy than that one box of candy that never was opened.

Lini Richarda Grol's (lrgrol@sympatico.ca) poems, stories and scissor-cut illustrations are in books and magazines.

Features

Thoughts about Islam and Christianity – Part V

CC continues the discussion of how Christianity and Islam relate to each other in part five of this six-part series. The two participants are John H. Boer and Bert den Boggende, scholars who wrote their answers to each question independently of each other. There may be overlap; there may be differences of opinion. We hope our readers will benefit from this discussion. We also encourage you to join the discussion via letters to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca) or comments on our website (www.christiancourier.ca).

Question 5: "What can Christians learn from Islam?"

Proud of their religion

John H. Boer

Years ago, in Nigeria, I met a Muslim along our long mission driveway. I greeted him in the local style, and he stopped to chat in the Hausa language. In the course of the conversation, I told him about my plans for the next day. I was going to do this and that, I confidently announced. He was silent for a moment, cocked his head slightly and then asked, "*Allah fa?* What about God? Does He not figure in your plans?"

I felt deeply embarrassed. Here was a Muslim for whom I was paid to bring the Gospel, and he brought the Gospel to me! I was brought up in a culture where the term "*Deo volente,*" Latin for "God willing," laced daily conversation. Immigrating to Canada where that term is rarely used, I had dropped it somewhere along the line. And, now, here was this Muslim reminding me of a neglected component of my inherited worldview and language.

That seemingly insignificant interchange has stuck with me ever since. "*Allah fa?*" Yes, indeed, what of God in our ordinary daily lives? His name interlaces most Muslim conversations, not, as in the West, as barbaric profanity, but as an expression of our dependence on him in everything. Of course, deep down I knew that God is there all the time, but the secular culture in which I grew up on Vancouver Island had made me careless and drop the lingo – and with it had blunted the edge of this spiritual awareness. It was still there, but marginalized, so that this Muslim gentleman was offended. He reminded me.

Deeply offfended

A major function Muslims can play in Western Christianity is that of reminder. We have been so deeply influenced by the pervasive secularism that much of our Christian sensitivities have been blunted and Christian standards marginalized, if not plain forgotten. We know the Name of Jesus is holy and needs to be revered, but when he is insulted in public life by sheer derision or outright exclusion, we shrug our shoulders.

A few years ago, the Anglican Church in the UK was silent when someone publicly insulted Christ, but the Muslim community stood up and denounced the insult. After all, Jesus is seen as a Muslim prophet second only to Muhammad. When someone is perceived as insulting Muhammad, even non-practicing Muslims get on their high horse and cause riots. But Christians just shrug their shoulders in indifference as if it is an inconsequential matter.

The generation that founded the *Christian Courier* was deeply offended by Canada's secularism and challenged it by establishing Christ-honouring, alternative social institutions. They took their issues to the highest courts of the land. Today, only half a century later, most of their descendants know little of and care less for those issues.

No shame

Muslims continually challenge this secularism and remind us of God across all of life. They have their prayer times, and little stops them from observing them. Certainly not shame or embarrassment. Neither are they embarrassed about being identified as Muslims and, thus, religious. In fact, they are proud to be Muslim. We may sneer at some of their female fashions, but who sees Christ in us with our fashions? Where has modesty gone? Women, without any apology on my part to those concerned with the politically correct, do you realize how many of you befudge the reputation of Christ among Muslims with your fashions? Muslims remind us of modesty not only but of the general need for morals, both private and public.

Of course, men who casually ascend Christ's pulpits in torn jeans and flip-flops similarly downgrade his holy Name by their lack of respect, a word we have almost forgotten. (Unless it is a conscious decision to identify with a population where such dress is standard.) While we have largely succumbed to the secular demand for separation of religion from both politics and government, Muslims boldly march into the market place with religion up front, even with Muslim banks. In contrast, we deride such banks that uphold moral standards that go beyond the financial bottom line. When Muslims speak of mission, they do not talk of mere mosque planting; they actively claim the entire world for God. Sounds familiar? Reminded of some things?

Muslims serve to remind us of the need to re-install God in our daily lives at every level. We Reformed Christians ought to respect them for it, observe them, listen to them and be reminded once again of our roots. Perhaps we can even cooperate with them at selected fronts.

Note: The Islam discussions are available on our website at christiancourier.ca. Click on Feature Ariticles.

Willingness to die

Bert den Boggende

With so much violence perpetrated by small segments of the Muslim world, it may be difficult to imagine that we can learn something from Muslims, especially from the radicals. It may come as a surprise, then, that I suggest that radicals can teach us something. However misguided I think they are and however wrong their methods, it is clear that they take their faith seriously. The most extreme are willing to die for what they believe. Jesus warned his disciples that following him would be costly. Paper membership in many denominations is rampant, and I suspect that even those regularly attending church would feel uncomfortable with Jesus' seemingly outrageous suggestions. Taking faith seriously means wholehearted commitment.

As their designation implies, radicals want to get to the radix, the root, and want to get rid of accretions that have accumulated over the centuries. Like the modernists, they want to purify Islam. This desire for purification is nothing new, having happened several times since Islam's birth. In Christianity this has taken place as well; perhaps the best-known example is the Reformation. Often Christians have mixed their faith with culture. For instance, missionaries wanted their pagan converts to dress like Europeans. What about our liturgical practices and organizational structures? Probably without realizing it, some of these practices and structures have their roots in pagan Rome. Richard Oostra recently pointed out the problem of laicization in his book *Church on the Rocks*.

However, if Muslim radicals are indeed serious about purifying Islam, then they must also realize that jihad should not be aggressive. If Christians want to purify the church they need to have a clear idea what the essentials and non-essentials of faith are.

Radicals and moderates both hold that women should be modest, most notably in dress but even when they speak. The notion of modesty seems largely to have disappeared from our vocabulary. Protestant and Catholic schools not infrequently have dress codes, usually meaning that some kind of outfit is improper in school, e.g. no bare midriff. Our Sunday best for church may have had a touch of fashion show, but behind it was also the notion that God deserved our best. Nowadays we seem to have accepted worldly standards. Muslims seem to apply the notion of modesty only to women, but why should Christians not apply modesty to everyone and everything – from dress, to housing, to cars, to politics? Remember ... Jesus had no place to lay his head.

In several volumes on the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria John Boer has pointed out the problem of secularization. But it is not a problem restricted to Nigeria. Theoretically Muslims are strongly opposed to secularism, and, as far as it goes, they agree with Abraham Kuyper's view of "every square inch." It seems to me that many Christians vote for a particular political party for socio-economic reasons; their Christianity seems to have little to do with their vote. I once talked to a Christian economics professor who maintained that Christian ideas did not enter into his field. Kuyperian Christians have long argued that education is not neutral, and in fact, no field of endeavour is neutral. It is no wonder that Muslims want to have their own schools. We may disagree with what is sometimes taught in their madrasses, but we can't disagree with their desire.

A note of caution is in order. When the term secularization appeared about 350 years ago it was thought that it entailed that religion would decline and disappear. This wishful thinking has turned out to be a myth. About half a century ago the British sociologist David Martin wrote a paper in which he argued for the elimination of the concept of secularization on the ground that it served only ideological rather than theoretical functions. Obviously he has not succeeded, but we should realize that not everyone uses the term with the same connotations. If secularization means the privatization of religion then we should join Muslims in objecting to that endeavour. If, however, it means the separation of organized religion from politics, then our ways with Muslims diverge. We don't want a privileged state church, or, conversely, a church dependent on the state.

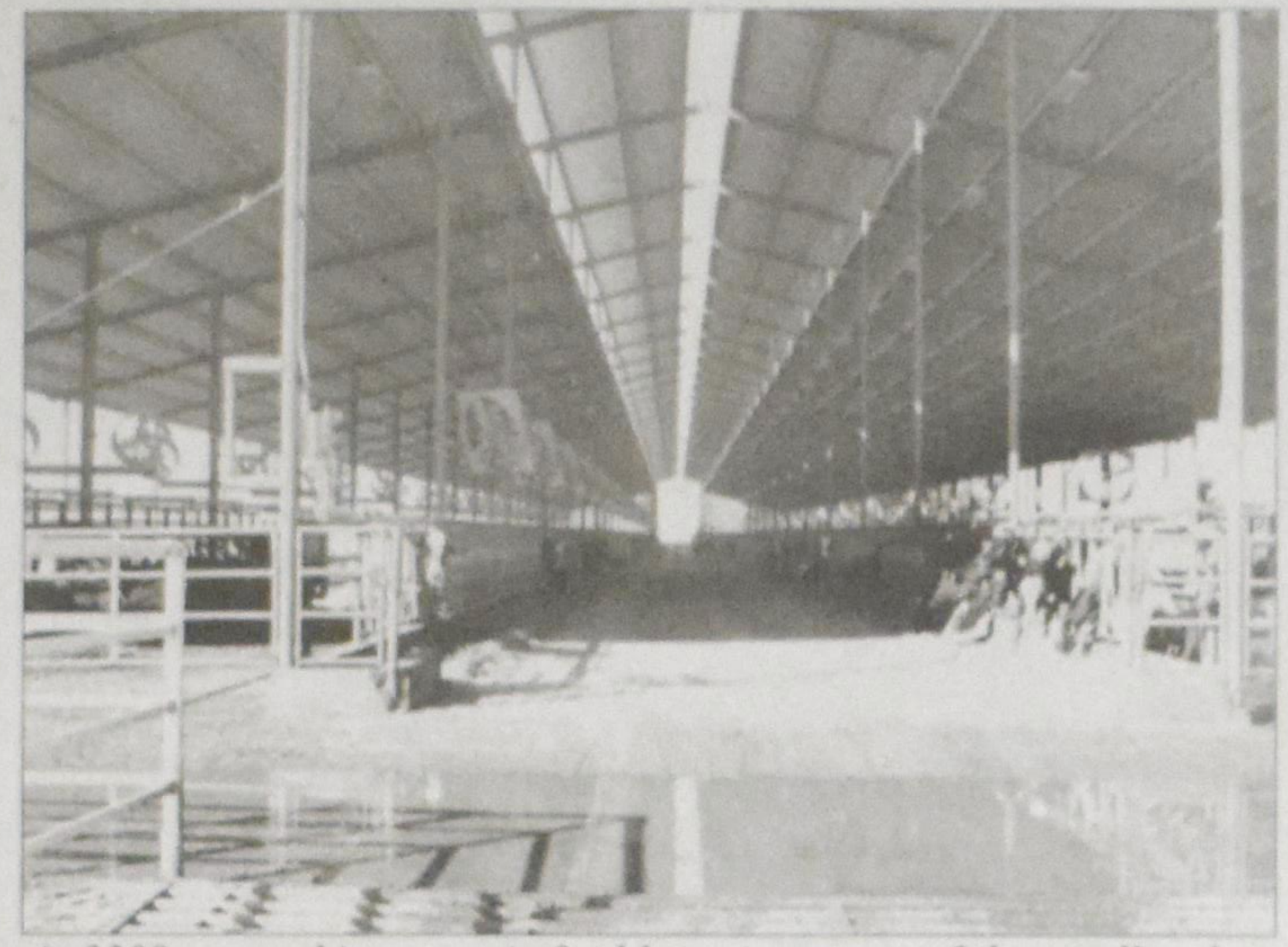
Generally Muslims reject both types of secularization, but when Turkey changed into a republic, it became a secular country. It took the "Christian West" about 1500 years, from Constantine to the American Revolution, to separate the state from organized religion, and even now there are state churches. We should give Muslims some more time to accept this form of secularization and join them in the objections to the other type.

(Those interested in the issue of secularization may want to consult *Fides et Historia*, 30:2 Summer/Fall 1998).

Columns

Country Living
Meindert van der Galien

The largest dairy farms on the planet


At 3300 cows, this open-air feed barn is on one of the smaller dairy farms in California.

There are no mailboxes and no farm signs at the road – nothing to identify them – at any of the mega-dairy operations I saw in the mid-San Joaquin Valley of California. That's probably because they are not family owned. There are other reasons these farms might not want to draw attention to themselves. At 500,000 dairy cows, Tulare County is home to the largest dairy farms on the planet. Add heifers and calves to that number and you have over a million head. California's dairy industry is huge, generating an income of $63 billion for the state in 2008.

My wife and I toured the 225-mile-long San Joaquin Valley this past October. The Central Valley is a rarely-visited arid plain that stretches down the state, wedged in between the mighty Sierra Nevada to the east and small coastal ranges to the west. Farming operations in Fresno, King and Tulare (counties in the Central Valley) boggle the mind. King County has the largest single cotton farm in the world, occupying 40,000 acres. The valley has hot, dry summers – temperatures hit 100 degrees – and cool rainy winters, perfect for growing cotton.

I didn't expect a friendly reception when I got out of the car and walked over to the milk house of one mega-dairy farm in Tulare County. My wife, and our sister-in-law from B.C., who ended up driving us 6,000 km through Washington State, Oregon and much of California, stayed in the car. That was smart. Showing up with two women might arouse suspicion – uh, animal welfare, maybe?

I asked two workers taking a break outside the milk house if a boss or foreman was around. They pointed to a tall man in short-sleeve green coveralls heading directly towards me. He was the manager of the farm. I introduced myself as a retired dairy farmer, and said I wanted to see a big dairy operation close up and take a few photos.

"We don't have these kinds of operations in Ontario, Canada," I said. "Only a few milk 500 cows at most."

He said this wasn't the place to visit. At 3300 cows, they were small compared to the bigger farms. If I went 10 miles south there was a farm milking 9500 and a bit farther up was one milking 15,000 cows.

Not bad for a start. And I wasn't booted off the farm.

Got milk?

We had driven by numerous mega dairies. This farm had the buildings closer to the road. For a first time visitor, the sight and scale of the dairies is overwhelming – enormous open-air sheds, mountains of feed covered neatly under plastic. Feed is an expensive commodity; everything is covered and there's no waste.

I wanted to take some photos of the massive barn beside me. I had questions to ask. Should I show him my Christian Farmers membership card? Naw, I'd have to get it out of my wallet.

I held up my big hands. That did the trick." Sure," he said, "as long as the photos don't end up on the Internet somewhere." He told me I could take whatever pictures I wanted to.

We had a very pleasant 15-minute conversation and exchanged a lot of information about dairy farming. They get only $15 a hundred-weight for the milk they sell. It's less than half of what Ontario farmers get, because the U.S. does not have a supply management and quota system for milk, which Canada has had since 1965. Ontario milk quotas cost around $25,000 per cow and there are no quotas for sale. That`s why Canadian dairy farmers aren`t milking thousands of cows.

This farm has 20 employees – mostly Mexicans. They take off seven to eight cuts of alfalfa a year. All the land is irrigated. The shortage of water in California is a huge concern for farmers. Environmental laws are a pain. They have both federal and state inspectors making visits. Liquid manure isn't just pumped out of the pit and spread onto a field – it goes through a separation process first.

I took numerous photos and then walked over to a newly seeded field to check the soil. It was the most horrible looking ground I have ever seen – sandy with egg-size hard lumps in it. It's no wonder. Until the mid-19th century, the San Joaquin Valley was a desert. Millions of flat, often parched land lay in wait for workers and water. Now it's a fertile valley, because of the constant irrigation.

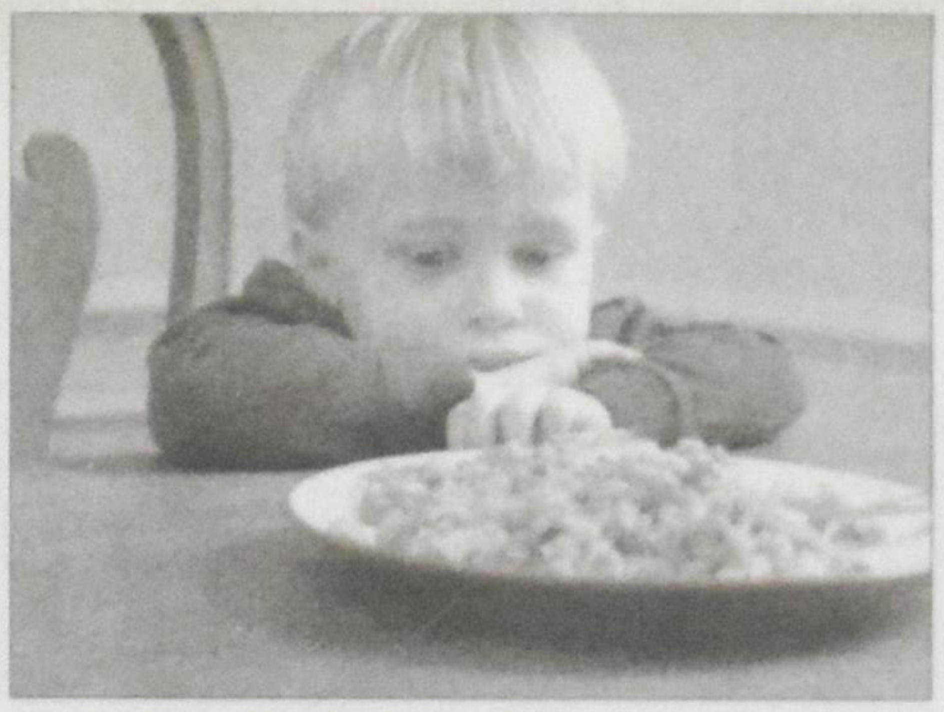
I tried to break some lumps in my hand. They wouldn't crush. It made me appreciate farming back home in the Ottawa Valley, especially the million-dollar summer showers and rainfall that God gives us so faithfully.

Meindert van der Galien (maynard@renfrew.net) is a farmer near Renfrew, Ont. He loved the California tour. The Pacific Coast Highway scenery is breathtaking.

My window seat
Mendelt Hoekstra

Never ostracize the cook

I am not a stereotypical male. Although I love sports, I'm comfortable talking about my feelings or crying in public. I'm not much of a drinker but if I drink, I prefer wine over beer. I am much more proficient with the piano than I am with changing the air filter on my van. I like to play with my kids and make their school lunches; I can vacuum, dust, do the laundry, dishes, and clean toilets. My diaper changing skills are second to none. Although I would love to come home from work, sit down in front of the fire and read the newspaper, in reality that is approximately a decade away. I have five children, three blonde-haired and blue-eyed and two black-haired and brown-eyed, live in a blended family and willingly substitute tackling parenting issues for sleep. I'm more than willing to seek professional advice, whether it is doctors or counsellors for help with life's issues. I happily take the passenger seat and let another drive.



But one thing I hardly do anymore is cook. It's not because I am inept in the kitchen, because I am not. And it is not because I don't like cooking, because I do enjoy making dinner. It`s because my spouse Shannon loves to cook. She doesn't do the majority of the cooking because it is her "role"– but because she loves creating in the kitchen; she takes pleasure in trying new recipes and enjoys the challenge of widening the taste palate of our family.

But sometimes, not very often, in fact hardly ever, her creations miss. They miss the mark in taste and in texture. This happened last week. It was a dud. Ouch.

It was a tricky scene. The kids felt the same way as I. They started to verbally suggest that it wasn't the tastiest thing they ate that day. But we have smart kids. They all know that there are two things on the menu every day. One is "– take it"– and one is "– leave it.". They took it. And so did I. And I found myself with three options.

Option one: Be thankful. And I was. I really was. I was thankful that I have food on my table, that I have a dear spouse that loves to make food and does it with love, care and with our health in mind. I was thankful that my children have a well-balanced meal every day and that my bank account can finance the grocery list every week. I was and am truly thankful. Thank you Lord.

Option two: Eat it. Take the mushroomy design and tackle it bite for bite. Hope that the meat was real chicken (it was in this case). Add salt and ketchup, which usually helps (it did not in this case). Eat each bite with the thought in mind that each bite is closer to the end of the plate. Try not to smell it. Try and remember that each spongy bite was actually good for me, that it was healthy and will help me grow taller. Remember after each bite that there was dessert. Dream of a peanut butter cookie for dessert. Take sips of milk with each bite and hope the milk would help the food slide down easier.

Option three: Write about it. Instead of addressing the issue immediately, write about it in *Christian Courier* and meanwhile, forget about it. This meant convincing myself that avoiding the issue is the right thing here, which is a line of thinking I very seldom take. It's not that Shannon is overly sensitive or couldn't handle constructive criticism; she is as tough as they come. It is also not because I didn't think Shannon would agree, because she is healthy enough to laugh at herself or chalk it up to a 'you win some and lose some' experience. But it was because I couldn't bring myself to say it was bad after she had worked so hard and was so excited for us to "try a new, delicious dish."

Three options. Wait, maybe there was a fourth option. Yes, there was.

Option four: Combine options one, two and three. Add some salty words, a pinch of humour, a bowl of the truth, and three teaspoons of optimism when she reads this column.

I chose option four.

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Columns

From Toddlers to Teens
by Denise Dykstra

Party parents: on still being social after you have kids

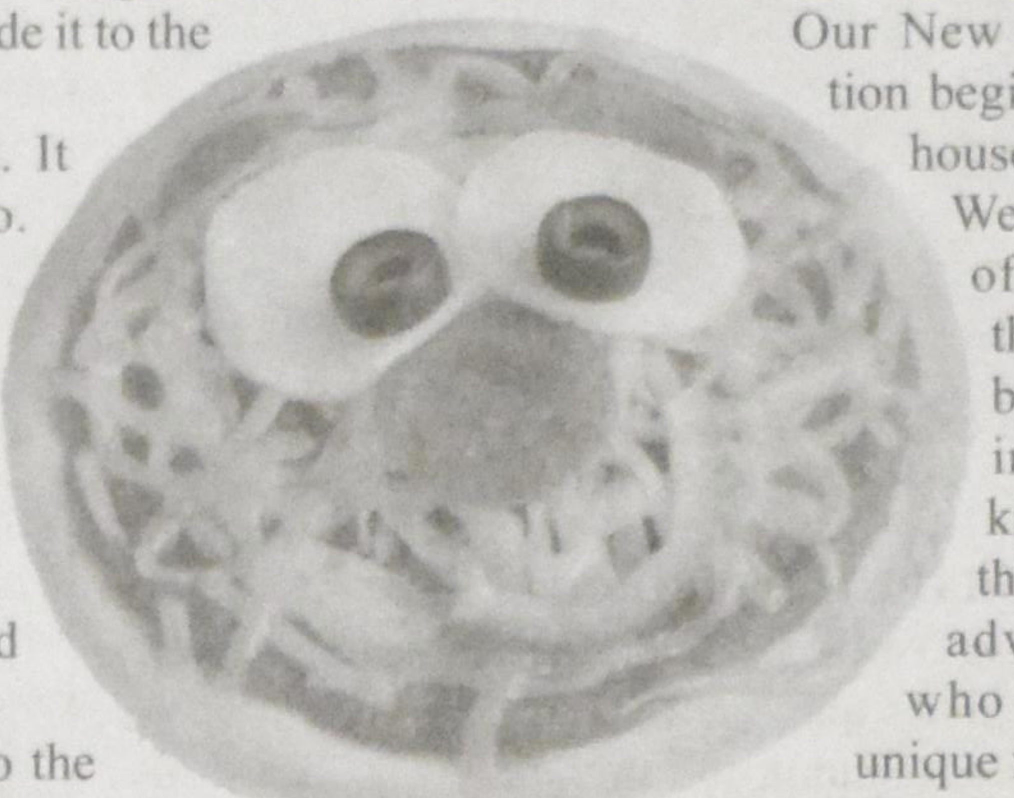
When Ray and I were first married, we went to the best New Year's parties. A bunch of us would file into someone's basement, open a few bags of chips, put on a stack of records and dance the night away. We'd slow down briefly to mark the New Year, then carry on until we were ready to drop. We didn't care what time we finally crawled into bed; after all, we could sleep as long as we wanted the next day. It was wonderful.

And then we had children.

At first we carried on like we had before, tucking our wee ones into a back bedroom somewhere and waking them up when it was time to go home. But eventually that became difficult. The number of kids began to exceed the number of bedrooms – and the number of arms to carry them home. Some of our children didn't like the idea of sleeping in a bed that was not their own. And some of our kids couldn't sleep because the music was too loud.

As our families grew, getting a decent night's sleep also became more important to us. Our infants didn't care what time we got to bed; they needed to eat early in the morning. Our toddlers didn't sympathize with our exhaustion; they hit the ground running the next day and expected us to keep up no matter how tired we were.

Slowly our New Year's parties became quieter and shorter. Sometimes the bells had barely finished ringing in the New Year and we were already out the door heading for home. It became a joke for the hosts of the party to have their front light out before the last of the guests made it to the end of the sidewalk.



Still we persevered. It didn't feel right not to. Getting together on New Year's was our way of celebrating God's faithfulness to us over the past year. It was our time to put failures and regrets behind us and make a fresh start.

New Year's was also the one holiday that didn't have any expectations of us. There were no gifts to exchange and no special foods to prepare. It was low-key and fun and, as a result, something we cherished. We weren't ready to give it up. So we reinvented it.

Embrace the stage you`re at

A number of years ago we, along with two other families, started a new New Year's tradition that exists to this day. This time we included our kids – 12 in total – adjusting times and locations according to their ages. At first our theory was "If you can't beat them, join them." But as the kids got older we realized it was a lot of fun when they were around.

Our New Year's celebration begins at one of our houses at suppertime. We enjoy a couple of appetizers and then assemble and bake our own six-inch pizzas. The kids get right into this. Especially the adventurous ones who like to invent unique flavours.

After dinner we hop into our vehicles and drive to the local bowling alley. For two hours we alternate between cheering our skill and rueing our hopelessness. The ups and downs of our games mirror the ups and downs of our lives. I find this symbolism perfect for New Year's.

Eventually we head back to one of our houses for snacks and drinks. The younger kids watch a movie and the rest of us pull out a puzzle. As we put the pieces together we reflect on the best and worst times of the past year. And some of us share our goals for the year ahead.

All of these activities are familiar and comfortable. And at this point in our lives I can't imagine spending New Year's any other way. I know our current tradition will change again someday; the very passage of time we celebrate will ensure it is so. Still, I'm not worried. Because no matter what we do to mark the New Year, we'll always do it full of hope.

The LORD's loving kindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."
(Lamentations 3:22-24, NASB)

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Intangible Things
Heidi VanderSlikke

Sandcastle resolve

On our last afternoon in Jamaica, I lounged in the shade of an almond tree by the beach. I listened to the crystal blue waves break over the sandy shoreline of Negril and enjoyed the predictable parade of locals. A ragged pair of Rastafarians serenaded sleepy tourists with the usual repertoire of Bob Marley songs. With a few more U.S. dollars in their battered coffee can, they moved along to the next resort down the beach.

Then came the Coconut Woman, making her afternoon rounds. She carried a large basket atop her head. Formidable hips swaying, she sang her high-pitched song, "De Coconut Woman is calling out. It's de Coconut Woman – hear her shout! Anybody want some froo-itt? Coconut! Banana! Mango! Pineapple! De Coconut Woman is calling out."

A steady stream of Jamaicans passed by at a respectful distance from resort property every day. They offered horseback rides, glass bottom boat tours, sunset cruises, hats, jewellery, tee-shirts and beach towels. You name it, they sold it. Just a short stroll down the beach would produce multiple offers of marijuana, hashish or the ever popular magic brownies. Jack and I laughed and wondered if we really looked like the dope-smoking sort. We soon learned to smile, decline and keep walking.

I watched with interest as a couple of middle-aged American men played contentedly in the sand, like overgrown boys. Armed with a garden shovel and a cake lifter for a trowel, they eagerly dug a walkway and piled up mounds of sand. They hauled water from the Caribbean with a hotel wastebasket and began to fashion their fantasy world. One man worked on the buildings – a classic castle, a pyramid, an amphitheatre, a detailed replica of the Parthenon. The other diligently formed a fortress wall to protect the emerging city.

Passersby paused to admire their handiwork. Someone commented on how beautiful it was. One of the architects replied, "Yeah, but it only lasts a day." He was right. Already the sun had dried out the pyramid and the wind began to erode its terraces.

Jack put down his book. "Why do they do that?" he asked.

"Something to do," I ventured. "Maybe it's a creative outlet, something to make them feel like they're not wasting their time loafing on the beach."

"Looks like work to me," he said, leaning back in his chair and tugging his hat over his eyes.

"A labour of love," I said. "The accomplishment is in the doing."

A month later I sit in our living room at home, staring out at the monochrome landscape of Ontario in the winter. By now that lovingly crafted city in the sands of Negril no longer exists. Like the ancient city of Tyre, impressive as it once was, its destiny was to be swallowed up by the sea.

I marvel at the swiftly changing seasons, and another year gone by. What might the year ahead look like? I love the idea of new beginnings, a fresh start. And yet, so often I have known the frustration of resolutions doomed to failure before the New Year is even a week old. Why bother? Nothing ever changes.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his devotional book, *I Want to Live These Days with You*, claims we have been liberated from "the murderous law of incessant beginnings." He writes, "Waiting day after day for the new beginning, thinking countless times that we have found it, only in the evening to give up on it again as lost – that is the perfect destruction of faith in the God who set the beginning once and for all time. . . . God has set the beginning: this is the joyous certainty of faith."

It strikes me that my well-meant resolutions are much like that sandcastle city. Fleetingly attractive, they keep me busy, help me to feel useful and creative. But in reality, they dry out quickly and surrender helplessly to wind and waves. I can almost picture the angels watching me scramble, one asking the other, "Why does she do that?"

So in 2011, tempted as I am to muster my wit and willpower to improve myself, I will look instead to the God whose mercies are new every morning. I'll thank him for granting me that new beginning I could never have engineered for myself. He will see me through this race he's called me to – guided by his word, powered by his Spirit and already accomplished by his Son. Despite pitfalls and perils along the way, one thing is certain: it leads to heaven's gates and a new beginning to end all others.

Now, won't that be a Happy New Year!

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ontario.

THE PUBLIC SQUARE
Harry Antonides

Wikileaks: when the centre does not hold

The fallout from the publication of hundreds of thousands of U.S. classified cables and other documents, masterminded by the Australian Julian Assange, has again exposed the radical split within American society.

The outlines of this story are now well known. A lowly private, 22-year old Bradley Manning, who had security clearance to two high-security networks, downloaded a massive number of Microsoft email files and sent them to Julian Assange. To hide this theft, he then erased the server logs that would have tracked his moves.

When Adrian Lamo, a 29-year old Californian hacker who befriended Manning, realized what was happening, he reported his findings to the authorities. Without the decisive action of Lamo, Manning's secrets might have taken a lot longer to be discovered.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration has dawdled and let months go by without taking any firm action. Attorney General Eric Holder was reduced to pleading with the *New York Times* to refrain from publishing the stolen documents. The Times' editors ignored his pleas and published the documents anyway, claiming that they were doing so out of respect for the public's right to know.

Paranoia

Julian Assange founded Wikileaks in 2006. The same year he wrote in his blog that "the more secretive or unjust an organisation is, the more leaks induce fear and paranoia in its leadership and planning coterie . . .. Since unjust systems, by their nature induce opponents, and in many places barely have the upper hand, mass leaking leaves them exquisitely vulnerable to those who seek to replace them with more open forms of government."

The leaked documents inflicted huge damage on the American war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan because it gave away secret information that the enemy can use to its advantage. In addition, it identified people who supported the American-led military effort, who now have reasons to fear for their lives (See John F. Burns, NYT, Oct. 23, 2010).

Most on the political left, including the *New York Times*, have defended the Wikileaks perpetrators. One of them is the 79-year old Daniel Ellsberg, famous for leaking the secret Pentagon Papers in 1971, which severely damaged the American side in the Vietnam War. Ellsberg calls Julian Assange and Bradley Manning "kindred spirits" and praises them for being willing to risk imprisonment and even death for leaking these papers. He has stated: "I've been waiting 40 years for someone to disclose information on a scale that might really make a difference."

What sort of difference is Ellsberg talking about? What does Julian Assange mean by a "radial shift in regime behavior" by creating "fear and paranoia" within the leadership of nations that leaves them "exquisitely vulnerable to those who want to replace them with more open forms of government"?

This is nothing but a call to revolution, a digital "off with their heads." Assange believes that Western democracies, especially the U. S., are so corrupt and dangerous that they are beyond improvement. They must be destroyed by extra-legal means of intimidation and violence.

Bradley Manning and Julian Assange

Bring on the Revolution

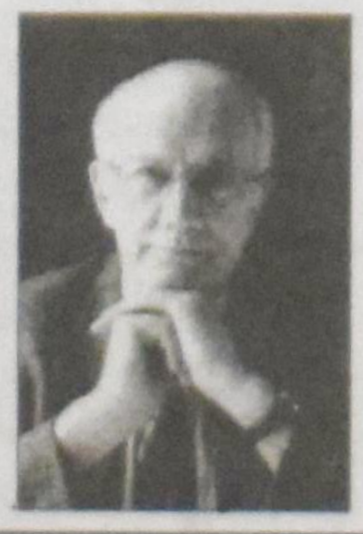
In other words, bring on the revolution, first by creating chaos and lawlessness to induce fear and helplessness among the population. Then, in the confusion, there will be the opportunity to create an entirely different society led by those in the know about creating a new society of justice, equality and peace.

On the other hand, there are many who call betrayal by its right name. Caroline B. Glick has written that the Wikileaks operation against the U.S. is "not merely a criminal offense to publish hundreds of thousands of classified US government documents with malice aforethought. It is an act of sabotage" (Jewish World Review, Dec. 3, 2010).

I believe we are in midst of massive changes that will impact every aspect of our lives. It's often the poets and "dreamers" who sense what is coming. One such person was William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), who wrote a haunting poem, *The Second Coming*, from which I quote a few lines.

...Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity....

It`s tempting to feel hopeless about what seem to be unstoppable forces of chaos and destruction. But then we should remember that in a real sense, the centre is holding because Jesus has come into this world not to condemn it but to save it (John 3:17). This is also why he tells us to pay attention to the signs of our times, so we are not clueless in a world of turmoil and confusion (Matthew 16:3). This world does confront us with evil and its heartbreaking consequences, which are overwhelming and totally beyond our abilities. But they are not beyond the Christ who came to take away the sin of the world. Therefore we may live in hope and believe this extravagant promise of Jesus: "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you".



Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ontario.

Those split seconds of crunchiness

Sally Hanan

My husband touched it as if it were pure gold bullion, and to him, it was. It stood there proudly, gleaming from a recent coat of hand-polished wax – a dark green, four-door BMW. My mouth hurt from my happy smiles for my man.

In order to understand his joy, one should be aware that for the previous four years my husband had driven a very old work van that was equipped with a steering wheel and not much else. A healthy tax return had enabled us to find this precious pot of gold on eBay, and we couldn't wait to smell the plether (plastic leather). For the occasion, we drove the family down to the big city in a rented minivan. I had a GPS licked to the windscreen, which helped us to get onto the right overpasses and into the parking lot where this little gem sat waiting. It was the smallest model one can buy in the BMW series, and my husband had wanted one that was a manual drive so that he could pick up on power. The smile on his face after he drove it around the block should have been on a TV show. I sat with the kids while he flourished the pen over the sale documents, and jumped up to rejoice with him when he waved the key in our direction.

They say a car loses value the minute you drive off the lot...

He planned to follow close behind our minivan so as to benefit from our GPS system. (The city isn't known for its easy access to places, and we knew that if we lost him, he'd be stuck in freeway purgatory for a very long time.) Cars were lined up on both sides of the car lot's exit. My husband pulled up beside me so that he could pull out at the same time and stay on my tail. Frontage road traffic was swift and voluminous, and just as we saw a gap and were about to pull out, a vehicle pulled up to the exit wanting to get in. My husband looked over his left shoulder and started to reverse, at the same moment as I looked over my right shoulder and did the same thing . . . CRUNCH. I knew what had happened, but I didn't want to acknowledge it. "What happened, Mummy?" said a little voice from the back.

"I think I crashed into your daddy's new car."

"Oh no!"

That was an understatement. My shaky hand managed to find the door handle, and I slipped from on high and let my feet find their way over to where my husband stood – right beside the foot-long dent in the back door. His eyes congregated with mine. His arms lifted up to rest around my torso. And he said, "It's only a car."

Making a choice

I don't believe anything *that* good went through his mind in those split seconds of crunchiness, but he made a choice as he stepped out of his waxed piece of mangled metal, and because of it, I have canonized him as my personal saint. He made a choice in those moments. Because of it, he is still alive to tell the tale ... .

Seriously, though, there are givers and takers in every marriage. I'm the taker in ours. I'm also the judge and jury, but once again, my husband demonstrated that love and forgiveness are the better options. Love and forgiveness shut the mouth of the one who could have jumped out of a car and instantly pointed her finger at the victim, just to sneak her way out of the cruddy feeling of shame that was oozing through her. Love and forgiveness made me feel accepted down to my core being, and affirmed that it was still safe to be me, in spite of me. Love and forgiveness also let me know that I was more important to my husband's heart than any material possession he could own.

So there you have it – my husband is a saint. If you'd like him to be the main speaker at your next men's group, call 1800-BE-SMART. It could save lives. (Just kidding.)

Sally Hanan (inkmeister@inksnatcher.com) is an Irish writer who escaped her country's desperate weather and diet of potatoes and cabbage by winning a lottery visa to America. Because her husband never reads what she writes, she now spends her days telling true stories of their marriage behind his back.

Features

Is excellence over-rated?

Cecil van Niejenhuis

Lately, it seems that everything needs to be excellent: Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, Sustaining Congregational Excellence, and Calvin Seminary's Center for Excellence in Preaching. In fact, the focus on excellence over the last years is not uniquely Christian Reformed, but is prevalent throughout our society in workplaces and institutions of learning. At first glance, a focus on excellence seems excellent! It encourages significant effort, attention to detail, a striving to be all that we can be. It encourages stretching ourselves, reaching beyond mediocrity, and the discipline necessary to reach new levels. A focus on excellence reminds us of the Olympic motto: "Faster, Higher, Stronger."

But I wonder if an uncritical acceptance of excellence as a goal, or as a "goal-den standard" could be blessed by adding some shades of nuance. How does an average preacher survive in a culture where only excellence will do? And, for that matter, how do congregations endure?

There are at least three cautions. First, are we excelling ourselves into exhaustion? More and more frequently, we encounter exhausted leaders: full-time pastors and committed church members who volunteer significant time, energy and giftedness to ministry. Churches seem compelled to keep up with the level of programming, ministry opportunities and the "worship experience" offered by other churches. Adapting, keeping up, employing the latest technology – these are exciting, daunting and draining challenges for the pool of volunteers, and for those paid personnel expected to communicate and lead by setting the pace. Driven by the goal of excellence, and desiring to be all that we can be – for God's glory and also for our own survival – (there is the reality of comparison shopping for the consumer public), we are working and volunteering ourselves to the bone. Excellence can unwittingly become a tyrant. Donald Trump is reported to have answered the question, "How much is enough?" with these insatiable words: "A little more."

Secondly, a focus on excellence has a corresponding focus on achievement. When achievement is tied to excellence, it can lead to a rather restrictive definition of excellence. Is excellence defined by level of accomplishment and polish of performance? Or is it defined by strength of effort and purity of motive? How do we know when we are witnessing that which is excellent?

In recent months, I attended three significant church anniversaries, ranging from a grand concert hall setting to a modest community banquet room. It was powerful to see musical gifts offered, enjoyed and celebrated. By certain standards, only some of these offerings could be considered excellent. But by a standard which does more than measure achievement, all were excellent. They acknowledged the Giver, offered what they could with what they had received, and the measure of excellence was one which placed these gifts and persons in the context of communities in relationship with God. Standards of excellence neither inhibited the cheerful offering of gifts, nor challenged the joy of knowing that imperfect gifts could bless God and his people. The intimidation factor which a standard of excellence can foster was conspicuously and wonderfully absent.

Thirdly, a focus on excellence can nibble away at a spirit of thankfulness. It can keep our attention on what we have not yet attained, rather than on what we have received. It can remind us unhelpfully of our inadequacies, distracting us from giving thanks and embracing the persons we are, the gifts we have received, and the contentment we may enjoy. A focus on excellence can unwittingly sabotage our experience of God's grace.

Excellence is not a bad thing. In fact, excellence is lovely and pure and it can beam! But excellence without grace is a tyrant. Excellence without the shine of joyful offering is tarnished. And excellence without the anchor of humble thanks lacks heart. Somehow, excellence needs to be able to embrace the reality of imperfection!

The God who commands us to love him with "all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37) is also the God who chose twelve imperfect disciples as his trainees. He chose a people named Israel, rather than an established, competent nation like the Egyptians or Syrians, who might learn faster, reach higher, and were certainly stronger than the Israelites. Mount Zion does not see eye to eye with Mount Olympus: it's not higher, faster, stronger, so much as lower, slower and weaker.

In any and every quest for excellence, there needs to be a dollop of hospitality: a making room, and creating space for others and their flourishing. And there needs to be room for the puzzling, counter-intuitive ways of God, who seems to delight in doing exactly what we would not.

After speaking at length about giftedness in I Corinthians 12, Paul says, "And now I will show the most excellent way." Excellence isn't over-rated. But it does need this qualifier.

Cecil is a consultant for the Office of Pastor Church Relations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He's been pastoring churches for almost 30 years. These experiences have taught him that excellence is best served in a marinade of grace.

The Sculptor

The canvas must be silent,
as the artist paints the scene.
The paper, too, waits anxiously
while the author shares his dream.
The many lines surrender
to the architect's keen plan.
The clay must yield to form and shape
in the gentle potter's hand.
And we – the most unyielding
of the universal tools,
Must learn to be compliant
In the way we will be used.
God works on us throughout our lives.
For only he's aware...
behind our masks of make believe,
a wounded soul lays bare.

Marcia K. Leaser

Marcia K. Leaser lives in Fremont, Ohio.

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Brenda Renee Hartemink

and

Alan Jason Opdendries

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Obituaries

ALBERT KOLK

Lutten, The Netherlands — December 19, 1936
Iron Springs, Alberta — November 28, 2010

Yes Lord!
Passed away at home into Glory.

Albert will be greatly missed and always in the memory of his loving wife and best friend for 52 years, Audrey Kolk (nee Van Roon).

He was the loving father of:
John and Laura Kolk, *Picture Butte, AB*
Thriesa and Mark Hubers, *De Motte, Indiana*
Verna and Rick Boonstra, *Telkwa, BC*
Claude and Judy Kolk, *Okotoks, AB*
Donna and Scott Forster, *Iron Springs, AB*
Leighton and Elinor Kolk, *Iron Springs, AB*
26 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren

Albert loved life and lived it to the fullest.
Life will be dull without Albert!
Good Night! – see you in the Morning!

Correspondence: A. Kolk and family, Box 329
Picture Butte AB T0K 1V0
email: akolka@hotmail.com

Anna Paulowna, Noord Holland — August 11, 1913
Grimsby, Ontario — December 24, 2010

Peacefully at Shalom Manor the LORD took home our mother, oma, great-oma and great-great-oma,

HENDRIKA BEZUYEN (nee Hooimeijer)

Predeceased in 1979 by her loving husband of 44 years,
Albertus Adrianus Bezuyen and grandchildren
Jeffrey Albert (1967), son of John & Ineke and
Sonya Jacqueline (1978) daughter of Jack & Debbie.
Loving mother of:
Jenny & Chris Teeuwsen, *St. Catharines, ON*
Jacob & Debbie Bezuyen (Bergman), *Jordan Station, ON*
John & Ineke Bezuyen (Colenbrander), *Vineland Station, ON*
Sonja & Richard Spikman, *Puslinch, ON*
Henny & Jack deVries, *St. Catharines, ON*
Albert & Helen Bezuyen (Bakker), *Virgil, ON*
Loving Oma of 21 grandchildren, 52 great-grandchildren and 5 great-great-grandchildren.

A celebration of her life was held in Covenant CRC, St. Catharines on Dec. 29, 2010.

He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress,
and for his children it will be a refuge.
Proverbs 14:26

Correspondence: Jenny Teeuwsen
401-1150 Vansickle Road, St. Catharnes ON L2S 2Z3

I met God in the morning

I met God in the morning
when the day was at its best,
And his Presence came like sunrise,
Like a glory in my breast.

All day long the Presence lingered,
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered,
Other ships were sore distressed,
But the winds that seemed to drive them,
Brought to me a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other mornings,
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I too had loosed the moorings,
With the presence left behind.

So, I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way:
You must seek Him in the morning
If you want Him through the day!

Ralph S.Cushman

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Bible Wordsearch — Persecuted Woman

Wordsearch 184 — Rev 12:1-10

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ANCIENT, ANGELS, ASTRAY, BIRTH, CARE, CHILD, CLOTHED, CROWN, DEVOUR, DRAGON, EARTH, FLED, FLUNG, FOUGHT, HEARD, HEAVEN, HORNS, HURLED, LEADS, LOST, LOUD, MICHAEL, MIGHT, MOON, NATIONS, PAIN, PLACE, PREGNANT, PREPARED, RULE, SCEPTER, SERPENT, SEVEN, SNATCHED, STARS, STRONG, SWEPT, THRONE, WAR, WOMAN, WONDROUS, WORLD

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Psalm 50

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jan 9 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching.

Jan 12 The World and our Calling annual lecture series. Redeemer University College, **Ancaster**. For more information, contact Marlene Raddatz at 905-648-2131 x4414 or mraddatz@redeemer.ca See ad Dec 27 issue.

Jan 21 A Festschrift for Theo Plantinga 7-10:30pm. Redeemer University College, **Ancaster**. For more information, contact Marlene Raddatz at 905-648-2131 x4414 or mraddatz@redeemer.ca See ad Dec 27 issue.

Feb 18-20 Marriage Encounter weekend. **St. Catharines, Ont**. Register at www.reformedme.org

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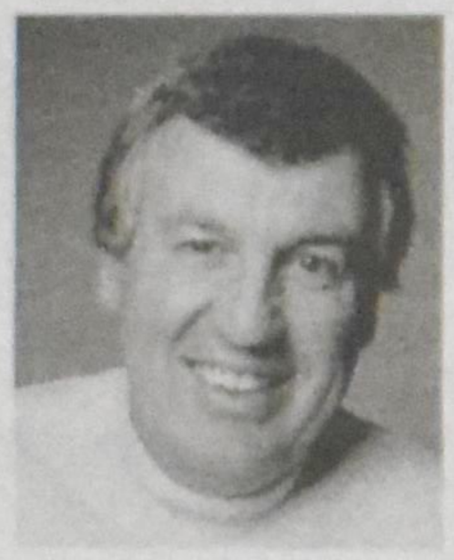

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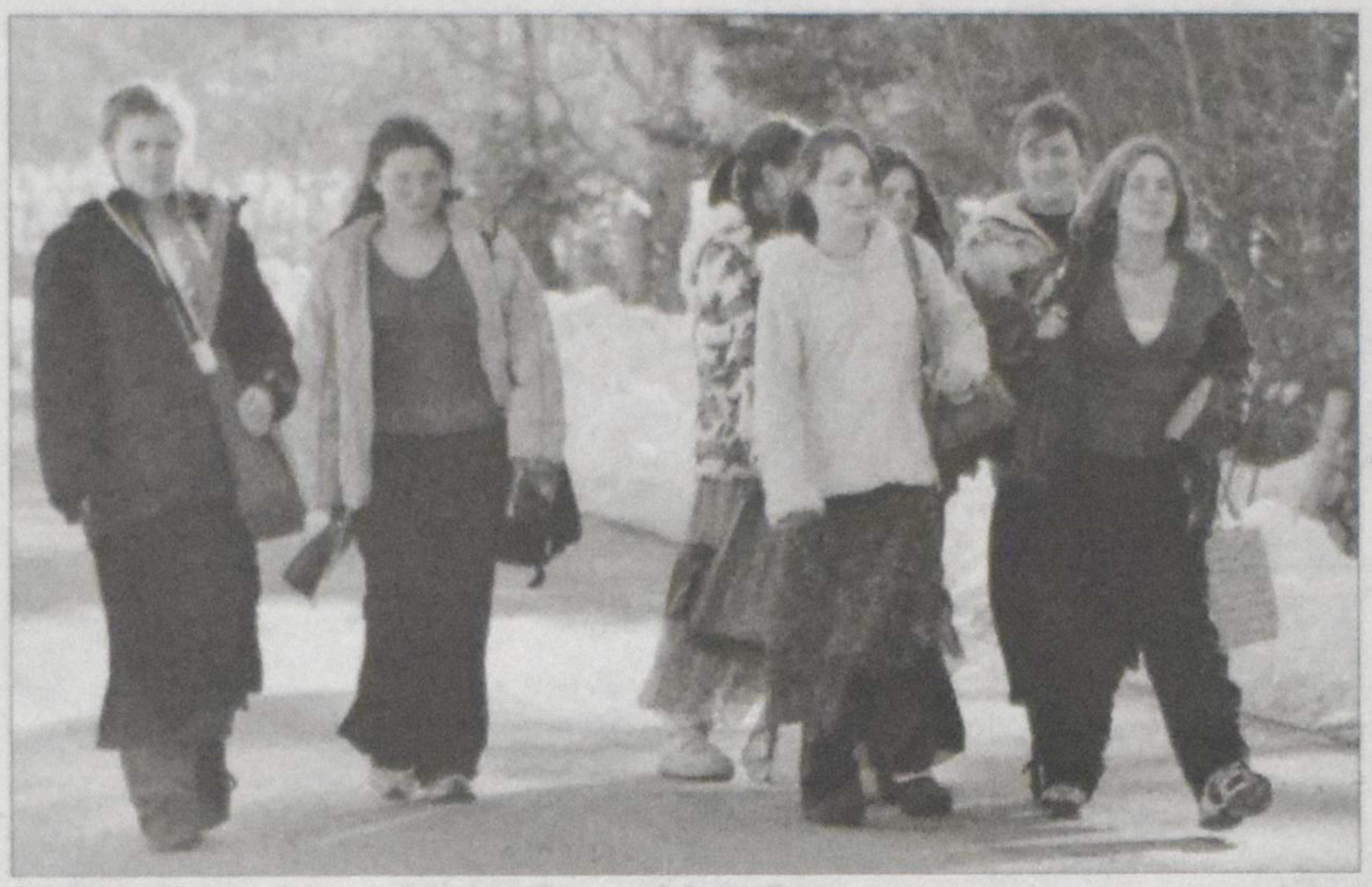
News

Polygamy Case challenges our understanding of religious freedom

Kathy Vandergrift



Walking home from school in Bountiful, B.C.

VANCOUVER, B.C. – The Polygamy Reference Case currently winding its way through the B.C. Supreme Court will have a ripple effect across Canada and the world. The Chief Justice will decide if polygamy should continue to be considered a crime or not. The two specific questions in the Case relate to Section 293 of the Criminal Code. Adopted in 1893, it made polygamy a crime in Canada, but it has rarely been enforced. Consequently, the court is examining whether criminalizing polygamy is consistent with the 1982 Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Are there conditions that define when it is a crime, such as age, abuse of authority, exploitation, or undue influence?

A deeper question is the relationship between the right to religious freedom and other rights. Much of the polygamy practiced in Canada is based on religious beliefs and is being defended under the Charter as protection for religious freedom. Most prominent is the practice of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (FLDS), centered in Bountiful, B.C., which has close links to similar U.S. communities. But there are other voices on the pro-polygamy side. Witnesses for the Canadian Polyamory Advocacy Association, for example, live with multiple partners in marriage-like relationships as a choice outside religion. These relationships include one woman partnered with two men, as well as the more familiar polygyny (one man with many wives) practiced by the FDLS and some groups within Islam and other religions.

A question of meaning

The definition of polygamy is one of the contested matters. At least five different definitions have been proposed as clarifications of the law. Even B.C. and Canada proposed different definitions, although they are on the same side in the case. Chief Justice Robert Bauman is being faced with arguments that some forms of polygamy are harmful but others are not.

That brings into contention the notion of harm. What constitutes the harm that justifies making polygamy a crime? Are other laws adequate to prevent harm? Does harm to general society justify criminalization, as B.C. and Canada argue? Some argue that it is the criminalization that causes the harm, not the practice itself. Harms for women and children are being contested in the evidence. Some women have testified that they choose polygamy, which has raised further questions about consent and free agency within a closed community, especially when it involves teenage girls.

It's a unique case: not civil, not criminal, but "reference," which means it includes testimony from academics on their research into polygamy. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC), which I chair, is one of the interveners, arguing that the state has obligations to protect a number of the rights of children that are at high risk in polygamous communities like Bountiful, B.C. So far, this testimony has highlighted the following risks for children:

- sexual exploitation of young girls;
- exploitative use of boys' and girls' labour;
- failure to fulfill girls' and boys' rights to education and equality rights;
- inadequate child protection mechanisms and unreasonable risk of child abuse;
- denial of children's rights to freedoms of religion, thought and self-expression, and their right to be have their views considered; and
- removing children from mothers to punish the mothers without due consideration of the best interests of the children.

This case has a particular resonance for Christians because it involves an independent FDLS school that receives provincial funding. Young girls are taught at this school that their eternal salvation depends on being willing to be given in a "celestial marriage" to a man chosen by the religious leader, often at a young age, as a second, third, or fourth wife. Does this fulfill their right to an education? Some argue this can be addressed through laws against sexual exploitation. But is it reasonable to expect a teenage girl to report to police and testify in court against a religious leader, when she has been told that her eternal salvation depends on obedience to that person?

Religious rights

These are knotty problems. Christians are quick to speak up in defense of religious freedom. Most are not so quick to speak up when other rights are violated in the name of religion. In this case, the Christian Legal Fellowship has argued that the practice of polygamy is not a religious belief that deserves protection. Others argue that lived religion is as legitimate for defining religion as orthodox creeds, and that majority religions are guilty of defining categories and laws to protect their interests and marginalize minority religions. John Witte, known to many *Christian Courier* readers, will be an expert witness for Canada, arguing that general harm to society justifies criminalization in this case.

The case in B.C. opens up the difficult question of the balance between the right to religious freedom and other rights. Public thinkers like former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Canadian political scientist Janice Stein have said that these kinds of issues relating to religious beliefs will be for the 21st century what conflicts between political ideologies were for the 20th century.

Kathy Vandergrift (kathyvandergrift@rogers.com) is chair of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC). She lives in Ottawa.

Odds and Trends

Things to watch for in 2011

Good-bye Afghanada: Canadian troops will (mostly) withdraw from Afghanistan this year, after a decade of involvement and 154 casualties among members of our Forces.

World leaders: Switzerland is set to host the World Economic Forum in January; France leads the sixth G20 Summit in November; and South Africa chairs the annual UN Climate Change conference in December.

Sports: The FIFA Women's World Cup will be held in Germany at the end of June, with new goal-line camera technology to rectify errors at the 2010 soccer World Cup.

CRC: The Christian Reformed Church of North America's (CRCNA) Synod will meet in mid-June at Calvin College. Two reports already available for discussion include Faith Formation (on baptism and the Lord's supper) and the Form of Subscription (document that church office-bearers are asked to sign).

Do justice: The CRCNA's Office of Social Justice is busy all year, but one of the events it's promoting this October is Fair Trade month. The theme for 2011 is 31 Days - 31 Ways: daily suggestions for how to help workers in developing countries.

Lucky pick: It's the Year of Rabbit, according to the Chinese calendar, which means pregnant mothers can expect articulate, talented, even-tempered and ambitious off-spring.

On your mark: In October, Hungary will host the World Sudoku Championship, where contestants will try to beat the Guinness World Record for solving a sudoku puzzle in one minute, 38 seconds. The record is currently held by an eleven-year-old in Australia.

Congratulations: In 2011, Twitter turns five and Wikipedia is ten; the 25-yr-old *Oprah Show* will air for the last time, and Barack Obama will celebrate his fiftieth birthday.

Royal wedding: Prince William is set to marry Kate Middleton on April 29 at Westminster Abbey, the famous thousand-year-old church where his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth, was married in 1947. The day has already been declared a public holiday by the British government, which seems fair since its taxpayers will be footing the wedding's security bill, likely to run into the millions.

Elevenses

Tolkien's hobbits would get along well with preschoolers: both love a hearty mid-morning snack. In 2011, elevens will be everywhere, although not necessarily the second breakfast variety. Here's the good news: if you like writing dates, this week offers the satisfaction of 1:11:11, at least for Canadians. Europeans will have to wait until November for the same combination. Many people are already getting ready to mark 11:11:11 this November, and not just because it's a rare chance for North Americans, who write month/day/year, to agree with the more logical European day/month/year. The triple eleven will emphatically commemorate Remembrance Day, as countries around the world have done annually since 1918. But here's the bad news: filling out cheques and forms is going to remain confusing on both sides of the ocean for at least another twenty years.

Finally, last year seemed to end the debate on how to pronounce the date beyond the second millennium. After nine tedious years of saying "two-thousand-and-", we seem to have agreed on truncating the first half to "twenty." As *The Economist* points out, this fits with the austerity measures in a post-recession world: "saying 'twenty-eleven' rather than 'two-thousand-and-eleven' is a 29 percent saving in syllables."

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